

DEC. 16

The Man Who Wouldn't Be King

A Fine Novelet by THEODORE ROSCOE

1939

ARGOSY

WEEKLY



*Danger Lies in Ambush
When Outlaws Ride the*

RAWHIDE ROAD

Bennett Foster's

*Breathtaking Novel
of the West*

*An Exciting Array
of All-Star Fiction
by*

THOMAS W. DUNCAN

MAURICE BEAM

E. HOFFMAN PRICE

and others



How to give gifts ...and please people

How often have you received a Christmas gift that was the "*last-thing-in-the-world*" you wanted? Join the **SPUGS** (*Society for Prevention of Useless Giving*) . . . Make yours a really acceptable, pleasing gift . . . one that will say "*Merry-Xmas,*" every week . . . all year long . . . a subscription to

ARGOSY

An ARGOSY subscription is the most acceptable gift you can give any member of any family for Christmas—**Everyone wants it! Everyone reads it!** Why, at this minute you're reading it yourself. And it's so easy to give, only **\$4.00 a year (\$5.00 in Canada)** or **\$2.00 for 6 months (\$2.50 in Canada)**. Send us the coupon and your check. We'll take care of all details—even to sending an appropriate gift card in your card.

ARGOSY, 280 BROADWAY, New York City

Enclosed find \$..... Please send ARGOSY for One Year () Six Months () to addresses below.

And Mail a Beautiful Gift Card to Each.

Name.....	Name.....
Address.....	Address.....
City.....State.....	City.....State.....

Send acknowledgment to—

Name.....	Address.....
City.....	State.....

Send Check or Money Order. Do not send cash unless by registered letter.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LUCKY— THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH, MARY. EVERYTHING LOOKS SO HOPELESS

IT ISN'T HOPELESS, BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY RADIO. TOM GREEN IS DOING WELL. TALK TO HIM

BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT. RADIO'S STILL A YOUNG GROWING FIELD

TOM'S RIGHT. AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOOD PAY

TRAINING AT HOME FOR RADIO IS PRACTICAL AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST

SOON I CAN START FIXING RADIOS

THERE'S NO END TO THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WELL TRAINED TECHNICIANS

OR WORK ON LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS

OR GET A JOB IN A BROADCASTING STATION

YOU SURE KNOW RADIO. MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THANKS! THAT'S \$10 EXTRA I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME

OH BILL. IT'S WONDERFUL. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME JOB NOW-- AND A BRIGHT FUTURE IN RADIO AND TELEVISION

I Trained These Men

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"When I completed 20 lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator."

HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 Madison St.
Lapeer, Michigan

Service Manager for Four Stores

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N.R.I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M— Furniture Co. for their four stores."

JAMES E. RYAN
1543 Slade St.
Fall River, Mass.

Over \$1,000 Before Graduating

"Before completing half the N.R.I. Course I was servicing sets, and I made \$1,000 to \$1,200 before graduating. I am doing Radio service work for myself now."

ASHLEY G. ALDRIDGE
1228 Shepherd St.
Petersburg, Va.

\$200 to \$300 a Month in Own Business

"For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between \$200 and \$300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field."

ARLIE J. FROEINER
300 W. Texas Ave.
Goose Creek, Texas

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

Radio is a young, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send

special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. Smith, President
Dept. 9NK, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Mail this to get 64 page book FREE

J. E. Smith, President
Dept. 9NK, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

NAME..... AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....



THIS BOOK has shown hundreds how to MAKE MORE MONEY

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 295 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 16, 1939 Number 4

Rawhide Road— <i>First of five parts</i>	Bennett Foster	6
<i>Take a dogie kid who can ride and shoot, cheat him out of his eye-brows, turn him over to outlaws—and get out of Destiny's way. A great new Western novel</i>		
Don't Look Now— <i>Short Story</i>	Maurice Beam	31
<i>The strangest things come up on dumbwaiters—maybe trash, and maybe a rat who's become a hero</i>		
Men of Daring— <i>True Story in Pictures</i>	Stookie Allen	43
<i>Lewis Collow—Jungle Cameraman</i>		
Thirteen Cats— <i>Complete Novelet</i>	Thomas W. Duncan	44
<i>The hospitality of Conrad Jones was polite—and diabolic; so perilous that his two favored guests sought safety in a den of lions</i>		
Maker of Shadows— <i>Second of five parts</i>	Jack Mann	66
<i>Warning of the foul mysteries: destroy this power or be crushed</i>		
The Man Who Wouldn't Be King— <i>Novelet</i>	Theodore Roscoe	88
<i>Ladies and gentlemen, George Washington! Here's one unrenowned yet cardinal moment from backstage of American history... The beginning of an unusual new series</i>		
Dark Thunder— <i>Fourth of five parts</i>	Robert Carse	104
<i>Brutish hopes perish in flame—and brutes prevail</i>		
Legends of the Legionaries— <i>Picture Feature</i>	W. A. Windas	119
<i>Lexicon of the Fighting Men</i>		
Doubt— <i>Short Story</i>	Samuel W. Taylor	120
<i>This is a prairie tapestry, woven of a woman's deception, a gun, and a small boy's fear</i>		
The Feverish Athlete	Dr. Charles Ticknor Tolson	42
Argonotes		128
Looking Ahead!		127

Cover by Marshall Frantz

Illustrating Rawhide Road

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.

WILLIAM I. DEWART, President

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD.
9 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4

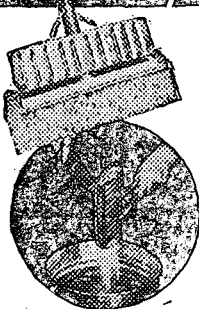
PARIS: BACHETTE & CIE
111 Rue Reaumur

Copyright, 1939, by The Frank A. Munsey Company

Published weekly. Single copies 10 cents. By the year \$4.00; in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, \$5.00; Other countries, \$7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unsuitable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

25,000,000 HOUSEWIVES ARE WAITING FOR THE Superlux CLEANER



Makes Mopping and Wall Cleaning Easy At last, a discovery that supplants the old-fashioned type of cloth, fiber and rubber sponge with the amazing new, practical du Pont Cellulose Sponge that holds 20 times its weight in water. So soft when wet, it cannot scratch or mar delicate surfaces. Can be sterilized by boiling. The new Superlux Cleaner, with its unique mechanical wringing feature, keeps housewives' hands away from dirty water. It is light in weight and easy to operate. Removable head is perfect for window and car washing.

AGENTS! Housewives buy on one minute demonstration. Make big money supplying them. Write today for full particulars and learn how you can get your mop free for demonstrating purposes by helping introduce it to others.

THE LUX COMPANY, Dept. M-58, Elkhart, Ind.

Since I took up writing for a hobby life is twice as much fun! . . .

says well-known New York business man*

"When I leave the office at the end of the day I step into a thrilling new world! You see, spare-time writing gives you the tremendous fun of creating something—of building up your observations and ideas so they're as interesting to other people as to yourself! And there's that other big thrill—the thrill of social recognition. For I've acquired hosts of interesting and important new friends. The profit is worthwhile, too!" . . . Lucky fellow, you say. Yet like all the men and women who have made a success of this profitable hobby he has a very simple secret—he learned how to write.

Learn to Write by Writing

A recent survey conducted by a famous university shows that *journalistic training* has proved itself practical over all other methods of learning how to write. For the careers of the majority of authors questioned (including America's greatest writers) were built on experience gained under the Newspaper Copy Desk Method! And that's the method Newspaper Institute of America uses to teach you professional writing as a hobby. You learn to write by writing unde. skilled constructive criticism, sympathetically directed to help you with your individual writing problems.

Each week you receive a fascinating assignment. Your work is analyzed by men of long newspaper experience. As you write, profiting by their corrections and advice, you find yourself acquiring a distinctive style. You master the intricacies of story construction—learn how to write a story vigorously, dramatically. In short, you're learning to write the kind of things editors will buy.

Here's How to Get Started

Send the coupon for our Writing Aptitude Test—it tells you honestly and accurately what your native abilities at writing are. You'll enjoy this interesting test. There is absolutely no obligation. Get started—send the coupon now. Newspaper Institute of America, 1 Park Avenue, New York.

*Name on Request.



FREE NEWSPAPER INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, ONE PARK AVE., NEW YORK. Send me, without cost or obligation, your Writing Aptitude Test and further information about writing for a profitable hobby.

Mr. _____
Mrs. _____
Miss _____
Address _____
(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.)

99L709

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge openings—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of the U. S. Successful graduates in every section of the U. S. We furnish all text material, including 16-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1252-L Chicago

A Correspondence Institution

IF I Send YOU THIS FINE SUIT—

Will You Wear It and Show It to Friends? I need a reliable man in your town to wear a fine, made-to-measure, all-wool DEMONSTRATION SUIT—advertise my famous Union clothing—and take orders. You can make up to \$12.00 in a day. My line contains over 150 quality woolsens all sensational values. You need no experience or money. I supply everything required, FREE of extra cost. Write me today for FREE details. H. J. GRAYES, STONEFIELD CORP., 1300 W. Harrison Street, Dept. A-708, Chicago, Illinois.

Learn TAXIDERMISTRY For PLEASURE and PROFIT

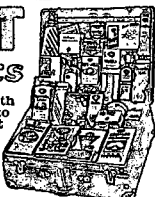
Learn how to mount birds and other animals by the simple, easy-to-learn Schoepfer Taxidermy Method—yours complete in one volume for \$1. Sent C.O.D. plus postage, or postpaid if you enclose \$1 now. (Send for our FREE illustrated 64-PAGE CATALOGUE listing our complete line of Glass Eyes, Furrifiers' & Taxidermists' Supplies.)

WE MOUNT ALL KINDS OF GAME GUSTAV SCHOEPFER—Established 1907 1200-L Broadway, New York, N. Y.

FREE OUTFIT Brings Quick Profits

Profits your very first day and all year 'round with my Proven Plan and big OUTFIT gives FREE to reliable persons. Outfit includes large assortment of full size packages. Distribute home necessities—over 200 fast selling, quick repeating, nationally known products guaranteed to satisfy! Full or part time. Liberal credit plan. Old reliable company. Write quick for my Free Offer.

E. J. Mills, 9667 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.



In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

Flush Poisons From Kidneys and Stop Getting Up Nights

**Be Healthier, Happier —
Live Longer**

When you can get for 35 cents a safe, efficient and harmless stimulant and diuretic that should flush from your kidneys the waste matter, poisons and acid that are now doing you harm, why continue to break your restful sleep by getting up through the night?

Don't be an EASY MARK and accept a substitute—Ask for Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules—right from Haarlem in Holland. GET GOLD MEDAL—the original—the genuine. Look for the Gold Medal on the box—35 cents.

Other symptoms of weak kidneys and irritated bladder may be backache, puffy eyes, shifting pains, burning or scanty passage. Don't accept a substitute.

Be A Detective Make Secret Investigations

Earn Big Money. Work home or travel. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE. Particulars FREE. Write to GEO. J. WAGNER, 2640 Broadway, N. Y.

FREE TRIAL OFFER

NEW REMINGTON DELUXE NOISELESS PORTABLE!



AS LITTLE AS

**10¢
A DAY**

The New Famous Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable that speaks in a whisper, is yours for as little as 10¢ a day. Brand new. Standard key-

board. Automatic ribbon reverse. Variable line spacer. Touch regulator and all the conveniences of the finest portable ever built. PLUS the NOISELESS feature. Act now. Send coupon TODAY for details.

You don't RISK a Penny

We will send you the Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable for 10 days' free trial. If you are not entirely satisfied, send it back. We pay all shipping charges.

FREE Typing Booklet, Special Carrying Case

You receive FREE a complete simplified booklet on Touch Typing prepared by experts. A handsome, sturdy carrying case is included. No obligation. Mail coupon for full details—NOW.

Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 145-11
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Noiseless Portable, including Carrying Case and Free Typing Course on terms as low as 10¢ a day. Send Catalogue.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

OLD LEG TROUBLE



Easy to use Viscose Home Method heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe the cause of your trouble and get a FREE BOOK.

M. S. VISCOSE METHOD COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois

SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS ARE YOURS!

VARUNA . . . ASTRO-ANALYST

Forecast your Future—Dealing with Love, Marriage & Business, mailed with Your FREE Horoscope. Send Birth Date, Month & Year, with only \$1.00 to P. O. Box 585e, Seattle, Wash., FOR THIS YOUR PERSONAL GUIDE.

PILES DON'T SUFFER NEEDLESSLY. Try this Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering FREE! If you are troubled with itching, bleeding or protruding piles, write for a FREE sample of Page's Combination Pile Treatment and you may bless the day you read this. Write today to the E. R. PAGE CO., Dept. 404-E2, Marshall, Mich., or Toronto (5) Ont., Canada.

PULL UP A CHAIR!

Enjoy this feast of fantastic fiction.
All in the January issue of

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

The "V" Force

A strange story of a menacing metal that brought evil wherever it appeared.

by F. C. Smale

On the Brink of 2000

A startling yarn of New Year's Eve in 1999

by Garret Smith

An Astral Gentleman

As a hermit crab changes its shell—this gentleman's astral self changed bodies.

An eerie tale by

Lull and Ainsworth

And other amazing, thrilling, astounding classics of fantasy by Farley . . . Starzl . . . Stevens . . . Merritt—and a weird travel story by Bob Davis.

Don't miss the January issue of this unusual, really different magazine.

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

NOW on all leading news stands
15¢ per copy

ANNOUNCING to people who need a practical know'edge of bookkeeping

A SHORT, PRACTICAL COURSE MODERN BOOKKEEPING

New, up-to-the-minute plan of training — the *Job Method*. You learn by doing. Interesting — simple — easy.

Planned for spare time of busy people. No previous knowledge or experience necessary. We train from ground up. Complete, yet no waste motion.

Specially designed for owners, managers, secretaries, office workers, etc. A half hour a day study at home enables you to clearly understand business records or to keep complete set of books.

Cost is low and convenient terms can be arranged. For full information—free—write Dept. 1258-HR

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION Chicago, Ill.



MASONS -

Send only one dollar and receive

A genuine leather billfold-card case. MADE TO FIT YOUR LODGE CARD, AUTO LICENSE, PASSES, etc., under is-glass windows ready to be seen at a glance. Holds 5 cards. Masonic emblem stamped in gold FREE. Your name stamped 35c extra. Oldest Masonic supply house in U.S. WRITE FOR FREE CATALOG.

The REDDING MASONIC SUPPLY CO., Inc. 17 WEST 23rd ST. NEW YORK, N. Y.

TYPEWRITER 1/2 Price

Easy Terms
Only 10c a Day

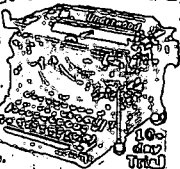
Saves over 1/4 on all standard office models. Also portables at reduced prices.

SEND NO MONEY

All late models completely refinished like brand new. FULLY GUARANTEED.

Big free catalog shows actual machines in full colors. Lowest prices. Send at once.

Free course in typing included.



International Typewriter Exch., Dept. 1236, Chicago

Here's Something You'll Want

100 PHOTO-STAMPS \$1.00

Send any size picture, snapshot, or negative with \$1.00 and you will receive 100 glossy gummed photostamps and the unharmed original. POSTPAID. Personalize your greeting cards, letters and business. FREE: Name or initials (maximum 7 letters).

AGENTS 25c for sample agent's outfit starts you in business. Refundable.

WANTED Complete Satisfaction Guaranteed.

PHOTO-STAMP MFG. CO. 1239 Broadway, Dept. M-1 NEW YORK CITY



HOLD TEETH TIGHT



WITHOUT POWDER (PAT. PEND.)
Dr. Burnett's Denture Lining works under a new principle. Stops falling teeth while eating, talking, laughing. Not a glue or powder. Nothing like it ever sold before. Quickly, easily applied. Let us prove our claims. We will send, postpaid, a complete trial for 25c together with complete instructions. Money-back guarantee. Ask for free, valuable information.

INLAND LABORATORIES, INC. Dept. 108 Box 3348 Merchandise Mart Chicago

LIGHTS ITSELF

SELLS ITSELF
Quick Action (1940) Perfected
Self Starting Lighter
Lights cigar, cigarette pipe—Instantly.
Never fails. New principle in ignition.
No flint. No friction.
Send 25c for sample and large can of fluid.
Agents report big earnings.

NEW METHOD MFG. CO.
Mfrs. Of No Flint Automatic Gas Lighters
Box MS-84, Bradford, Pa., U. S. A.



TOMBSTONE

Genuine Marble also Granite.
Low Prices. Free lettering.
Satisfaction guaranteed. Erected
in cemetery if desired. Write
us now for FREE Catalog of
beautiful designs, also samples
of stone.



U. S. MARBLE & GRANITE CO.
ONECO, A-45, FLORIDA



Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

IF you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LIEPE METHODS FOR HOME USE." Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. *Liepe Methods*, Dept. M-32, 3264 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Monastery Secrets

... THE FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE OF TIBET

What strange secrets of nature are locked within the mountain fastness of Tibet? What control over the forces of the Universe do these cloistered sages exercise? For centuries the world has sought to know the source of their power—to learn their mastery of life, and their faculty for overcoming problems with which the masses of mankind still struggle. Have they selfishly deprived humanity of these rare teachings?

WRITE FOR THIS FREE BOOK

Like the streams that trickle from the Himalayan heights to the plateaus below, the great truths of these brotherhoods have descended through the ages. One of the preservers of the wisdom of the Orient is the Rosicrucian Brotherhood (not a religious organization). They invite you to write today for their FREE Sealed Book, with its amazing revelations about these mysteries of life. Address: Scribe R. H. K.



The ROSICRUCIANS
AMORC
San Jose, Calif.
U. S. A.



Rawhide Road

By BENNETT FOSTER

Author of "Rider of the Rifle Rock," "Spurs for Sacatone," etc.



CHAPTER I

THE KID FROM WYOMING

AFTER the long wait in the Denver depot, the rhythmic clicking of the wheels was a reassuring sound. Thad Breathea, his broad young shoulders pushed back against the red plush, his booted feet resting on the opposite seat, let himself relax a little. But now and then he cast an apprehensive glance at the bulging telescope grip on the brass rack overhead.

One day's travel had somewhat inured Thad to this utterly new mode of transportation, and now that daylight had come he tried to appear at ease. He felt a weariness

that hard work had never given him. The tension of waiting in the Denver depot, of staying awake and guarding the telescope grip, had worn him down and now, despite his will to vigilance, his head drooped and his chin rested on his chest.

In all his twenty years Thad Breathea had never ridden on a train before, had never been any further from the Valley Ranch than the little cowtown of Fort Blocker. He was finding the clack of the wheels and the rolling motion of the car very soothing.

The trainboy, coming through the car, stopped and looked down at Thad. The trainboy had sold this drowsing youngster a sack of candy, some peanuts, and a dry

*A Fine New Novel
of the Roaring West*



Young Thad Breathea came down from Wyoming to see the world. But being a dogie kid he stumbled into such a snarl of skullduggery that it took an outlaw, a judge and a hundred rounds of ammunition to head him toward his heritage

and tasteless ham sandwich. Momentarily the trainboy toyed with the idea of wakening Thad; then he shrugged and went on. Greenhorn! he thought scornfully. He went on to the seats at the end of the car where he kept his stock and began methodically to rearrange his baskets.

Cinders poured into the car through an open window, a whiff of smoke followed the cinders, and from the engine the long wail of the whistle announced an approaching station.

"Trinity!" the brakeman bawled at the door of the coach. "Trinity!"

The jolting stop awakened Thad. He sat up, looked above him to see that his grip was still in place, and rubbed his eyes with big knuckles. Outside the sun beat down from a blue and merciless sky, and

on the platform beside the motionless car, a voice drawled:

"Don't come back, Ten High. You won't be welcome in Trinity."

There was no answering voice. Thad, looking out the window, could see the red brick of the station platform, a dray drawn up beside it, the horses hitched, drowsing in the sun.

A tall booted man, black hat pushed back on his head, stepped into Thad's range of vision and turned, exposing a star on the pocket of his open vest. At the rear door of the day coach there was a small commotion and then the bump of a grip as it struck against the side of a seat.

Thad, looking warily down the aisle, saw a man in a checked suit come along the

length of the car. There were hearty voices at the door. Out on the platform someone wailed: "All a . . . booo . . . ard . . ." and with a jerk that snapped Thad's head against the plush, the train started.

ACROSS the aisle from Thad the man in the checked suit was settling himself. With the ease of the accomplished traveler he swung his grip to the rack and sat down. He removed the narrow brimmed, brown derby, blew a cinder from it and placed the hat beside him. Thad, watching from the corner of his eyes, saw him stand again, pull off the modish checked coat, fold it meticulously, and place it over the back of the seat.

With that done the newcomer rolled back his shirt cuffs and sat down once more. Carefully pulling up each trouser leg a trifle, he rested his feet on the seat opposite him. Thad envied him his nonchalance.

"Hot, ain't it?" said the man across the aisle.

Thad turned. The new passenger was looking at him, a grin on his small pointed face.

"Yeah," Thad agreed. "Mighty hot."

It was a relief to talk. From Denver on, only the trainboy and the conductor had spoken to him. Thad twisted around further in his seat.

The man in the checked suit waved a hand. There was a big signet ring on one finger, and a heavy watchchain crossed the checked vest. "We go up quite a little here," the man said. "They've got a tunnel built up on top. You want to close your window when we get to the tunnel."

Thad reached toward his opened window.

"Not now," his fellow traveler counseled. "I'll tell you before we reach the tunnel. Travel much?"

"Not much," Thad answered. "I don't travel a great deal."

"Where you headed?" The man stood up, swaying with the motion of the car.

"I'm going to Redondo."

The trainboy, coming along the aisle, surveyed the new passenger with shrewd eyes, went on. No use of trying to sell that fellow anything. When the trainboy had passed, the man in the checked suit stepped across the aisle and settled himself comfortably beside Thad.

"Redondo," he said. "I don't know the town. I thought I knew every town along this line."

"It's not much of a place I guess," Thad said apologetically. "It's close to Las Flores."

"I'm headed for Las Flores." The small brown eyes studied Thad. "My name's Croates." He held out his hand.

"I'm Thad Breathea." Thad took the extended hand and shook it. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Croates."

The conductor paused beside the seat. After he had punched Croates' ticket, he eyed the man narrowly, looked at Thad, and seemed about to speak. Then, evidently thinking better of it, he moved on.

"Cowboy, ain't you?" Croates said.

"Where you from, Mr. Breathea?"

"I'm from Wyoming," Thad replied.

"That's a good country," Croates announced. "Not so hot up there as down here. You travelin' on business?"

"Kind of," Thad answered. "You see my father died up there and he left me a letter to deliver to a man down in Las Flores. We had a hard winter and the bank had to close us out after father died, and there wasn't anything to keep me there so I . . ."

Croates nodded. "You thought you'd see some new country," he suggested. "I don't blame you. Travel is broadenin', I always claim."

"That's what I think too," Thad agreed. "I never—" He broke off abruptly. He had been about to admit his own inexperience.

"You'll do a lot of it," Croates prophesied. "That is, if you got money enough. It takes money to travel."

Thad grinned ruefully. "I had the price of a ticket to Redondo," he said. "That was about all the bank left me."

Croates was still smiling. Now, at

Thad's announcement, the smile remained but the interest in the brown eyes died away. "Well," said Mr. Croates, "if I can help you any let me know. I'm right across the aisle." He stood up briskly and went back to his seat. The train toiled on, up and up. Once more Thad rested his head against the red plush.

ENOUGH money to get to Redondo, he had said. That was essentially true. There was a little more than that, but not a great deal, and Judge Althen had warned Thad not to tell anyone that he was carrying money.

Thad put his hand into his coat pocket to reassure himself that the envelope holding the one hundred and four dollars and the other one containing his letter were still there. Satisfied, he lowered his hand.

A brakeman stopped beside him, scowled, and reached over to close the window. "Coming to the tunnel," the brakeman announced.

Thad sat erect. He had never seen a tunnel. The beat of the engine was a muffled roar; gray walls began to slide past. The gray was supplanted by darkness and Thad put his hand on his envelopes again.

When daylight once more entered the car, Thad relaxed. Across the aisle Croates was asleep. Mountains were on either side, moving slowly by, and Thad let his head droop once more. Weariness slipped over him, but the brief exchange of words with the man in the checked suit had stirred his mind, and now his thoughts went back over the chain of events that had brought him so far.

One by one those events marched across his mind: his father's death from pneumonia in the spring, the request that strange, silent man had made of Thad; Judge Althen's office and the talk that had gone on there—all the incidents that had combined to draw Thad Breathea away from the lonely ranch in Blocker Valley. Judge Althen had not wanted Thad to make this trip alone, but Thad had persisted.

"Gato!" the brakeman bawled. "Gato!"

Across the aisle Croates was putting on his coat. He smiled at Thad. "Stretch my legs," he announced. "You comin'?"

"No," Thad said. "I don't think I will."

There was a commotion at the rear door. Passengers were getting on at Gato. Thad broke off his introspection and looked back. Men were filing into the car, three of them. Behind the third man came Croates, a broad grin on his face. The train jerked as it started, causing the newcomers to stagger in their stride. Thad saw them sit down, Croates with them.

The train moved again and Thad gradually settled into his thoughts. Ahead of him in the car, voices drawled indistinctly. Under him the wheels beat a swift rhythm. The sun slipped westward, hot on the car windows.

Thad was thinking that he knew little about his father and his family. All he knew was the years he had spent on the ranch in Blocker Valley, the stern face of his father, his father's voice setting tasks for him, the few men who came to the ranch, the little town of Fort Blocker. Now, with strange and exciting new knowledge, he was on his way to prospect into the past.

"You want some peanuts?" the trainboy said. "Nice fresh roasted peanuts?"

Thad Breathea looked up at the trainboy. "I don't want any," he answered. "And I don't want any candy and I don't want another ham sandwich."

"There ain't any use gettin' tough about it," the trainboy snapped. "I just asked you."

"I don't want any," Thad said again. The trainboy went on.

THAD'S tongue touched his dry lips. He was conscious now of the heat, of the sweat on his body and the thirst that burned his throat. Rising, he went to the water cooler at the end of the car, but it was empty. He noticed then that Croates and the other passengers had disappeared. With a glance at the telescope grip, Thad went on forward into the smoker.

Thad, steadying himself with the seat backs, walked down the aisle toward the water cooler. Croates and the three men who had got on at Gato were playing cards, seated about the center of the car. As Thad passed, Croates looked up at him and grinned. Two other passengers were looking over the card players' shoulders. Thad reached the end of the car, took the chained tin cup and filled it.

He drank two cupfuls, and started back. As he reached the card players, hot voices rose and one of the onlookers stepped out into the aisle. Perforce Thad stopped.

"You can't get away with that!" One of the players had both his hands spread on the table and glared at Croates. "There's not enough cards in this deck. I had that ace of diamonds—"

"Now wait!" Croates interrupted smoothly. "You can count the cards if you want to." Thad felt something brush against his leg; something slipped down into his boot. He glanced down. Croates' hand was resting on the seat arm, just beside Thad.

"You bet I'll count 'em!" The man with his hands on the table suddenly began to sweep the cards together. There was money on the table, a pile of it in front of Ten High Croates, smaller piles before the other players. "You're damned right I'll count 'em, an' if I'm right—" He broke off, glaring at Croates, the cards gathered in his hand.

"Count them then," Croates said. "I thought this was a friendly game to pass the time. If that's the way you feel about it though . . ." He made a little gesture with his hands. The man holding the cards wet one thick thumb and began to count.

"Forty-nine," he announced when he finished. "I knew you'd been holdin' out, you little skunk! Damn you!"

"Search him, Joe!" The onlooker who had stepped into the aisle made the suggestion. "See if he's got the holdout on him."

Croates pointed face was pale. "Gentlemen . . ." he said.

"He won't have it on him." The man beside Joe spoke up. "He was holdin' out all right, but he won't have his holdout on him. This fellow here was sittin' across the aisle from him when we come in. Mebbe he's got the holdout. Mebbe he's workin' with Ten High." The men stared at Thad.

"How about it?" Joe snapped. "You workin' with Ten High?"

"I never saw this young man before," Croates announced, his voice reedy. "I never—"

"We'll search 'em both," said the man in the aisle. "Here, you!" He reached out a hand toward Thad Breathea.

Thad, remembering the envelopes in his coat pocket, stepped back quickly. Joe snarled, "He's got it," and came struggling up from behind the table, bumping against it, his hand reaching back toward his hip pocket.

"Stand still," the man in the aisle commanded.

"Keep your hands off me!" snapped Thad.

"The hell I will!" the man in the aisle growled, and took a step forward.

THAD BREATHEA was twenty years old. There were sloping muscles under his coat, toughened by work, rawhide in their strength. The reaching hands touched Thad's coat and those muscles responded swiftly. Thad's hard right fist moved up from his side and crashed against the jaw of the man in the aisle. The man sagged like a bundle of old clothes and dropped limp.

Joe, behind the table, held a gun in his hand. Thad saw it and leaped. Straight across the table he went, his long lithe body fast as a cat's. His right hand clamped on the hand holding the gun. Joe's breath, heavy with liquor, struck Thad's face. Then, left hand pumping, Thad struck again and again. Joe's eyes glazed and went blank and Thad released his grip.

Croates had come out of the seat as Thad leaped in. Somehow he had cleared the tangle of bodies over the table and

was in the aisle. As Thad straightened, Croates' voice came shrilly.

"Now gentlemen. Now gentlemen. This is a peaceful game but if you—"

"He's got a derringer!" one of the others shouted. "Look out! He's—"

Thad was clear now. He went over the man who lay in the aisle, tripping in his haste and regaining his feet by catching the seat backs. Blindly he fled toward the door of the smoker, jerked it open and gained the platform. Behind him, as the door swung shut, he could hear shouting voices. He did not pause. He pulled open the door of the daycoach and went in. There, beside his seat, the brakeman stood, swaying in the aisle.

"You're gettin' off at the next station," the brakeman announced. "We're comin' in to Redondo. Say—what's the matter?"

"In the smoker," Thad panted. "There's trouble."

The brakeman brushed by him, running toward the smoker. Under Thad's feet the speed of the train began to lessen. Thad reached up for his telescope grip, pulled it down and hurried toward the rear door of the car. The train slowed further, and when Thad had gained the steps, a yellow box-car slipped past, and the train halted.

Thad, gripping the telescope, went down the steps. Further along the train the conductor, standing on the ground, lifted his hand and waved. The engine barked explosively, the couplings clanked, the cars jerked. Thad dashed around the end of the box-car station, stopped and looked indecisively to right and left. Behind him the train was in motion. He had a glimpse of the conductor on the step waving again to the engineer. From the engine came a sharp *boot . . . boot . . .* as the signal was answered.

Thad put the telescope on the ground. On the track the last red car rolled past, and Thad could see the iron railing that surrounded the rear platform. He wiped the sweat from his face—with the back of his hand and watched that platform grow small. Then, as it disappeared, he reached up to make sure that the letters were in

his coat pocket. His eyes grew blank and he brought out his hand, empty. The two envelopes were gone.

CHAPTER II

RIDE TO REDONDO

WITH the discovery, Thad took two steps after the departed train and then stopped. There was nothing he could do. His letter and his money were gone and he could not get them back. He picked up the telescope-grip and went around to the front of the box-car.

The sun was hot and there was no shade. The box-car station was deserted. It sat beside the tracks, the steel reaching away to north and south, mountains lying smokily to the west, plains stretching endlessly to the east. Thad called. He pounded on the door, he peered through the single dirty window. He heard nothing; saw nothing.

Presently, desperate and yet helpless, he sat down on the telescope grip and stared at the mountains. He felt the strange presence in his bootleg and mechanically reached down into the boot-top and brought out what he found. There were three cards in his hand: an Ace of Clubs, a King of Diamonds, a King of Spades. Thad looked at the cards, unaware of their significance, hardly noticing them. Listlessly, he opened his hand and the cards fluttered down.

He was still sitting on the grip, heedless of sun and heat, when the cart came. Thad heard the sound of hoofs on the ground, the rattle of wheels on stone, and getting up from the telescope grip, he went to the end of the box-car. There was a two-wheeled cart stopping behind the station, a single occupant on the seat. For a long moment the man and Thad stared at each other. Presently the silence between the two was broken.

"You're Thad Breathea?" said the man on the cart.

"I'm Thad Breathea," Thad answered. "Are you Mr. Krespin?"

The man on the cart nodded and dis-

mounted slowly. "I got your letter," he said, advancing. "I wrote for you to get off at Redondo. It's closer to the ranch than Las Flores. You might as well get in."

"I'll get my grip," Thad said.

When he returned, Krespin had climbed back to the seat. He gestured toward the rear of the cart and Thad lifted up the telescope and put it in the box. When he climbed to the seat, Krespin clucked to the horse and, staring straight ahead, turned the animal in a long curve and drove toward the east.

"So you're Carl Breathea's boy," he said, after the curve had straightened out and the horse was trotting steadily eastward.

"Carl Breathea was my father," Thad agreed.

"You wrote you had a letter for me from Carl," Krespin said.

Thad looked at the man beside him. Krespin was not a small man; he was medium in size; but he gave an impression of smallness. His face was pinched and a narrow goatee decorated his chin. His shoulders slumped forward and his chest was hollow. The gray hair at his temples was thin and his hands were thin, and the veins stood out prominently across their backs.

"Well—got the letter?"

"I had a letter but I lost it on the train," Thad answered. "Dad gave me a letter to you before he died, and made me promise I'd deliver it. I was going to do that."

"You lost it?" Krespin's voice was sharp.

"And my money," Thad answered. "There was some trouble on the train. I don't know whether the letter fell out of my pocket or if my pocket was picked."

Krespin made a little clucking sound with his tongue against his teeth. "You got any way of identifyin' yourself?" he demanded. "Any way so that I'll know you're Carl Breathea's boy?"

"I lost the letter," Thad said again. "It was all I had, Mr. Krespin."

AGAIN Krespin clicked his tongue against his teeth. "That's bad," he said, and then after a little pause. "It'd be mighty bad if it was anybody but me. You'd have trouble."

Thad made no comment. Krespin eyed the boy narrowly, looked at the road and spoke once more. "You see," he said, "yore grandfather is dead. There's his estate to settle up. You've got a little money comin' from the estate."

"I didn't know," Thad said slowly.

"Yore father never told you nothin' about how things were down here?" Krespin asked. He was looking at Thad now, searching the boy's face.

"No," Thad said, "he didn't. I wasn't until just before he died that I knew where he'd come from."

Krespin said, "Ummmm," the sound whining through his nostrils.

"He gave me that letter he'd written and he told me to bring it to you," Thad said. "He said that his father lived close by Las Flores. He said that I was to come to you or to his father and that one of you would look after me. I didn't need looking after." There was pride in Thad's voice. "I could have got a job in Wyoming, but Dad asked me to come."

"So you wrote to me an' I wrote back," Krespin said. "An' now you're here."

"I'm here," Thad agreed. "I wish you'd tell me about my father, Mr. Krespin. And about my grandfather."

"You don't know a thing?" Krespin persisted, looking at Thad again. "Nothin'?"

He sounded unbelieving.

"Not a thing," Thad shook his head. "Dad died of pnemonia. I think he wanted to tell me at the last, but he couldn't. He gave me the letter and I promised to bring it to you, and after that . . ." Thad's voice trailed away. His eyes were hard with the thing that he was remembering.

"Well," Krespin said, watching Thad's eyes, "your father and your grandfather had trouble. They had a quarrel. Your mother died and your father got into a

fight and killed a man. Right after that he took you and left this place. I'd never heard of him till I got your letter."

So it was like that.

Thad nodded wordlessly. Krespin flicked the loose lines against the rump of the trotting horse. "You see," Krespin said, "your grandfather, Jake Breathea, married again after your grandmother died. He married my mother. I've been with him ever since then. Up until he died."

"Then you're my uncle," Thad said.

"Step-uncle," Krespin corrected.

"And my grandfather's dead?"

"He died pretty near a year ago."

The horse trotted steadily. Krespin kept his eyes on the horse and on the road. "Yore grandfather," he said suddenly, "left the ranch to me. I'd been with him, you see, an' him an' your father had had this fallin' out. He left me the property." Krespin's eyes flicked from the road to Thad's face. Thad was not looking at his companion. Thad's face was blank of expression.

"Of course you got a little legacy," Krespin continued. "You got . . . two hundred dollars!" He got out the last words hurriedly.

"I wish you'd tell me about my father and mother," Thad said. "Is my mother buried here?"

"Yeah," Krespin answered. "In Las Flores. She . . . Whoa!"

The horse stopped. Krespin was reaching under the seat. He brought out a short-barreled Winchester carbine and his eyes were fixed toward the right of the road. "Coyote!" he snapped. "He . . . Here! You shoot! Do you see him?"

Thad too was staring toward the right. He saw the brownish-gray, doglike animal loping off toward a rise perhaps a hundred yards from the road. Automatically he held out his hand for the carbine.

"I see him," Thad answered.

Krespin put the gun in the boy's hand. Thad moved to leave the cart and Krespin spoke sharply. "Don't get down! Shoot from the cart!"

Thad stood up.

ALL his life Thad had handled weapons. The Winchester cuddled familiarly to his shoulder and his cheek pressed against the stock. The hammer clicked sharply as he cocked the weapon and then there came the flat, whiplike report. Under the running coyote the dust spurted, and the bullet whined as it ricocheted. The horse stood up in the shafts, rearing high and leaping ahead, almost upsetting Thad. Krespin brought the horse down.

"Missed!" he snapped. "Here, give me—"

The coyote was running now, really settling down to business. Once more the gun's report sounded, sharp and authoritative, and the running coyote, caught in mid-leap, came down, a limp bundle of fur. Once more Krespin quieted the horse.

"I wasn't used to the gun," Thad said quietly, reseating himself. "I held too fine the first shot."

Krespin took the gun from his passenger, replacing it under the seat. Starting the horse, he circled out from the road toward the coyote. When they reached the limp body he stopped the horse. He gave Thad the lines, got down and lifted the coyote by the tail. "Hide's no good in the summer time," he remarked. "You hit him in the shoulder anyway. That spoils a pelt. You want to shoot for the head."

Thad made no answer. He considered that he had done well to hit the coyote at all. The animal had been running, was a good hundred and twenty yards away, and Thad had been shooting from the shaky platform of the cart. Krespin dropped the dead coyote and climbed back into the cart. Taking the lines, he drove back toward the road.

"You said my mother was buried in Las Flores," Thad reminded after they had reached the road.

"Yeah," Krespin agreed. "She's buried there. I'll show you her grave. Likely you'll want to see it."

"I do," Thad said.

The cart rolled along, the silence broken only by the sound of wheels and the *clop*,

clop, clop of the horse's hoofs striking dust.

"I'll take you in an' get you that money tomorrow," Krespin said suddenly. "Two hundred dollars."

Still Thad said nothing. Krespin's voice was sharp when he spoke again. "Likely you thought you had a fortune comin'," he snapped. "Let me tell you, young fellow, you're lucky. Anybody but me would tell you to get the hell out of here. You haven't a thing to prove you're Carl Breathea's boy."

"It isn't the money," Thad said. "I was just thinking about my dad and my mother."

"Oh," Krespin grunted.

The bay horse kept a steady pace. Krespin, his eyes narrow, watched his passenger, dividing his attention between the boy and the road. The road broke sharply, turning a little north and diving sharply down. Lifting his eyes, Thad saw that they were going off a cap rock, dropping over a sheer escarpment, down and down. Beyond the caprock lay a flat country broken by buttes and hazy with the distance and the sun. Never before had Thad Breathea seen a rimrock country such as this, and he drew in his breath with a sharp gasp.

"A big country," Krespin said, voicing Thad's thoughts. "Mighty big."

The road went on down, twisting and turning. The bay horse held back against the cart, pushing against gravity, following the road. Then the descent ceased and they were at the bottom of the hill. Krespin turned toward the south and presently the horse stopped at a fence. Thad opened a gate, closed it, and got back into the cart after Krespin had driven through.

"This is the Lazy 5," Krespin announced. "Here we are."

THEY were going up a canyon now, an indentation in the gigantic well of the rim. Before them was a cluster of buildings, a house, sheds, corrals, a barn and a low lying bunkhouse. Krespin stopped the cart in the yard.

"Here we are," he said once more.

Thad watched while Krespin unharnessed the horse and turned the animal loose; then the two walked toward the big dwelling house, Krespin talking as they moved.

"We're brandin'," he said. "I've got a crew out with the wagon. There's nobody at the ranch but the cook."

The door of the house opened and a Mexican, brown skinned and gray-haired came out on the porch. Thad and Krespin had reached the porch steps, and the cook spoke swiftly to Krespin, his Spanish sibilant and swift. Thad, with no word of that language, looked at the man blankly. Krespin answered and the Mexican went back into the house.

"If it's all right with you," Krespin said, turning to Thad, "I'll put you in the bunkhouse. There's beds down there. I'll take you down now. You'll want to clean up before supper."

Thad nodded. He was preoccupied, staring about him, looking at the buildings, at the corrals and above all at the great rock wall that towered above the place, dwarfing it.

"Come on then," Krespin said.

There was water in the bunkhouse, and soap and a towel. Thad used these and ran a comb through his stubborn brown hair. When he had completed his toilet, he left the bunkhouse just in time to see a man ride into the yard, dismount and turn his horse into the corral. The newcomer walked stiffly toward the bunkhouse. He paused when he saw Thad in the doorway and then came on. He was a slight-bodied man, narrow-shouldered, hawk-faced. As he reached the bunkhouse he nodded to Thad, said, "Howdy," and went on in.

Thad said, "Hello," and waited beside the bunkhouse door. Krespin came hurrying down from the big house. As he reached Thad, he said: "That's my foreman, Prince," and he too went into the bunkhouse.

Thad seated himself on a bench that stood against the bunkhouse wall. Voices

floated out to him as he waited. Presently Prince and Krespin reappeared and introductions were made. Prince had a pleasant, drawling voice and his black eyes were alert and keen. He looked competent, well worn and useful. A cowman, Thad decided; a good hand on any man's ranch.

Prince had that thing that Krespin lacked: the ability to put a man at ease, and as the three walked toward the big house together Thad felt a release from tension. But his liking for Ben Prince left him abruptly when they reached the house.

A cat followed by two small kittens came from the house and walked sedately toward them. She passed by, some distance from the men, but the kittens, little and clumsy, did not get out of the path. Prince, still drawling pleasantly to Thad, kicked a kitten from his way, kicked it viciously, sending the little animal flying. His voice did not break its even tenor.

In the kitchen supper was ready. Pedro moved from stove to table, setting out the meal, and both Prince and Krespin spoke to the man in Spanish. Thad noted that Pedro eyed him curiously, but the boy thought nothing of that.

When the meal was finished Krespin spoke to Thad. "I've got to talk to Prince before he goes back to the wagon," he announced. "There's a lamp in the bunkhouse an' you'll find a bed there. I'll see you before you turn in."

THAD left the two men together in the kitchen, and made his way to the bunkhouse. Lighting the lamp, he sat down beside it, and idly picked up a dog-eared book he found on the rough plank table. But he did not read; he sat staring at the wall, thinking over the events of the day.

He was still sitting there, motionless, when Prince and Krespin came in. Prince was returning to the branding camp. He bade Thad goodbye pleasantly, spoke briefly to Krespin concerning the work, and departed. Krespin sat down opposite Thad. For a little time the only sound was

Prince's horse trotting off into the darkness.

"I wish you would tell me some more about my father," Thad said at last.

Krespin sat in the doorway, hands drooping over his knees, eyes fixed on the outer blackness. "There ain't much to tell," he said. "Like I told you, your father an' your grandfather quarreled. They quarreled over your mother an' your dad pulled out of here. He had a little place close to Las Flores.

"Your mother died. It seemed like your father blamed that on your grandfather. Anyhow they never spoke to each other after that. I had all the work around here to do. Everything. Your father never helped.

"Then he got into trouble with the Parkeses. They had some difficulty over water an' there was a fight an' your father killed Tom Parkes. It was self-defense an' he was turned loose, but there was a lot of feelin' in the country an' finally Carl sold out his place an' took you an' left. We never heard from him."

"And that's the story?" Thad said, his voice a little hoarse.

"That's it," Krespin answered. "When your grandfather died he left me the ranch. I'd earned it. Tomorrow I'll take you in to Las Flores an' give you what money you got comin'."

Krespin got up abruptly. With no further word he walked off into the darkness. Thad Breathea sat in the bunkhouse beside the table. The lamp, its wick uneven, began to smoke. Automatically Thad reached out and lowered the wick.

CHAPTER III

QUIET NOON IN LAS FLORES

DESPITE Thad's weariness, despite the long trip and the wakeful night spent in Denver, the boy did not sleep much the night of his arrival at the Lazy 5. He dozed fitfully, at each awakening his thoughts reverting to the story that Dale Krespin had told him. He believed

the story. What else was there for him to believe?

With the coming of daylight Thad dressed and joined Krespin in the kitchen of the big house, and they ate breakfast. Krespin talked but little during the meal, but when they had finished, he made an announcement.

"We'll ride in to Las Flores this mornin'," Krespin said. "We can cut across an' save time. I've got some horses up."

That was so. Thad had been awakened by the horses coming in, and before he dressed he had looked out to see Krespin penning them. The two left the table together and walked down across the yard toward the corrals. Krespin opened the gate and went into the pen and Thad stood outside. There were two bridles on the fence and a rope hung from a post. Krespin took the rope.

"You can use that split-eared bridle," he called to Thad. "I'll get you your horse."

Thad took the bridle and watched while Krespin roped out a big bay from the milling horses. Then Thad went in and put on the bridle. Krespin pulled his rope down over the headstall and reins and Thad led the bay out of the corral. Krespin caught his own horse and bridled it.

They tied the horses to the fence and went to the saddle-shed together. Krespin pointed out a saddle that Thad could use, an A-forked affair, so ancient that the leather was cracked and curled. Drawing out the old blanket on which the saddle rested, Thad used it to rub off the bay's back; then he tossed up the saddle. The bay stood quietly enough, rolling one glassy eye at Thad as he pulled the latigo tight, and swelling a little when the cinch bit in.

Krespin finished saddling before Thad; he sat on his horse, waiting. When Thad mounted, the bay humped his back but stood quiet. Krespin said, "Come on. Let's go."

Thad pulled the bay around. The brute was surly and unwilling. Thad knew the

horse was mad by the way he stood, the way his ears laid back. Krespin was moving toward the end of the corral. As he reached it, his horse shied and bucked a jump and Krespin yelled shrilly. With no warning whatever, Thad's horse broke in two.

The bay's head went down between his knees, his back arched and he bucked viciously, pitching in a circle, throwing his sides as he pitched. Caught off-balance, Thad was loose in the saddle. Still he made a ride. The first few jumps jolted him clear to the crown of his head; then, regaining equilibrium and watching the horse, Thad began to outguess the bay, to move as the horse moved, shifting weight and balance with the automatic instinct of the real bronc rider.

The bay was squealing now, head still between his legs, back arched high, feet pounding as he came down. Thad was riding him. The bay, apparently, knew it. He redoubled his efforts and then, as Thad still stuck, the horse reared. Thad was expecting him to go up and come down. He thought the horse was a hard buckner, but not crazy. There he misjudged his mount. The bay went up, front legs pawing, head up, rearing to his full height, and then threw himself on over backward.

THAD went up with the horse. Then he felt that added surge and knew that the horse was going over. Thad kicked free of the stirrups and threw himself to the left. As the bay crashed down on his back, legs threshing, Thad struck the ground, too, falling on arm and shoulder and rolling free. Only a horseman could have done it—a horseman with luck riding his shoulders.

For a moment Thad lay on the ground, then scrambled to his feet. Krespin, his face white, was off his own horse, running toward the bay and Thad. The man was panting, his eyes wide and his lips parted, showing his yellow teeth.

"Are you hurt?" Krespin demanded. "My God! I thought he'd kill you."

Still dazed, Thad could not answer for

the moment. Krespin reached out a hand and grasped Thad's arm. "Are you hurt?" he asked again.

"I'm shook up some," Thad answered, regaining his breath. "For a broke horse that's—"

"He never did that before," Krespin said harshly. "He never bucked when we broke him. I don't—" He wheeled from Thad toward the bay.

The horse was getting up. He got his forefeet under him and sat on his haunches like a big dog. Krespin took a step toward the animal. Thad, a little to one side, saw that the man's face was livid, his eyes black with fury. Krespin reached a hand under his coat, jerked out a gun and before Thad could intervene, the gun crashed and the bay dropped.

"That'll teach you, damn you!" Krespin cried shrilly.

He wheeled to Thad then, the gun still in his hand. For a moment Thad was frightened at the madness in his eyes. Then, his hand trembling and the color slowly draining from his face, Krespin restored the gun to its hidden holster. Uncertainly he walked to the corral fence and leaned against it, trembling violently.

"I thought he'd got you when he threw himself back," Krespin said. "I thought he had."

Thad felt a little sick. He went over to the bay and looked down at him. Krespin's shot had struck the animal behind the ear, and there was a little stream of blood issuing from the hole. Mechanically Thad noted that there was a brand on the bay's neck—a Diamond Bar. The boy turned away from the horse and looked at Krespin.

"There wasn't any need to kill him," Thad said quietly.

"I'll not have a horse like that about the place!" Krespin said hoarsely. "My Lord, man! Don't you know he almost got you?"

"I got clear," Thad said. He turned away from Krespin, bent down and loosened the cinch on the bay. He felt the need for something to employ his hands.

Presently Krespin joined Thad. The cinch was loose now and the little ranchman pulled off the saddle while Thad eased the weight of the dead horse from the cinch. When the saddle was clear, Krespin put it against the fence, tossed the bridle beside it, and walked over to his own horse. He had no trouble catching the animal, and he began to unsaddle.

"We'll drive the cart into town," Krespin announced. "I don't think I could ride in after that."

Thad made no answer. When Krespin had freed his horse, Thad picked up the old saddle and the split-eared bridle, put the blanket over his arm and followed Krespin to the saddle-shed. Outside again he looked toward the house. Pedro was standing on the porch watching the men and the corrals. Idly Thad wondered how long Pedro had been there.

Krespin made short work of catching another horse and harnessing him. He hitched the animal to the cart, wrapped the lines around the whipstock and spoke briefly to Thad.

"I've got to go to the house a minute," he announced briefly, and strode away, leaving Thad beside the cart. When Krespin returned, he climbed to the seat and gestured to Thad. Thad, coming over the wheel and settling himself, knew why Krespin had gone to the house: the odor of liquor was heavy on the man's breath. Krespin lifted the lines and the cart started. Thad looked down at the dead bay as they rolled past, but he said nothing.

THE two rode out of the ranch yard and along the winding road that they had traversed the previous evening. It was not until they had begun to climb the great hill that led to the top of the caprock, that Krespin spoke.

"I wouldn't have had that happen for anything," he said. "Not anything."

"It was an accident," Thad agreed.

"That horse never bucked before," Krespin repeated. "I never knew him to buck."

"Well," Thad said, "he won't do it again."

"No, he won't, the devil! I killed him—and good riddance!"

No more was said concerning the horse or the almost fatal accident. Thad wished to avoid the subject and apparently Krespin was satisfied. Twice during the long ride Thad tried to break the silence, tried to get Krespin to talk about Carl Breathea. Krespin's answers were so short, so abrupt, that the boy finally gave up.

It was eleven o'clock by Carl Breathea's watch that Thad pulled from his pocket, when they reached Las Flores. Instead of driving to a livery barn, Dale Krespin turned the cart toward the plaza of the little town. There, in the square, he tied the horse to a hitch-rail and looked up at Thad who had not yet climbed down from the seat.

"I got to see a man," Krespin announced. "You wait here for me. I'll be right back."

"I want—" Thad began.

"Yeah," Krespin interrupted. "You wait for me an' I'll go with you. I'll drive you to the cemetery." He turned and went off across the street.

Thad blinked at Krespin's back and then slowly climbed down from the cart. He leaned against the hitch-rail, standing in the shade of a great cottonwood that grew from the little plot of ground in the center of the plaza. He saw Krespin go into a brick building that bore on its glass windows the sign: *First State Bank*.

Thad wanted desperately to begin his search. Here he was in Las Flores where there must be men who had known his father. The trouble was that Thad did not know where to begin. All the way down from Wyoming he had been bewildered. He was still bewildered. He would wait for Krespin, he decided. That was the thing to do.

Krespin came out of the bank and went on down the street without looking at Thad. Thad started from the hitch-rail, then relaxed once more. Krespin would be back in a few minutes, he told himself. He could afford to wait a few minutes.

LEANING against the rail, he studied the pattern of the little town. Las Flores was built around the plaza. There were adobe buildings, long, low, single-storied affairs, flanking the plaza on its four sides. Streets ran into the plaza on each corner so that their intersections made sharp right angles.

In the shade of the cottonwoods a half-dozen men loafed, dark-skinned natives who moved slowly if at all. In front of the buildings there were tin awnings shading the board sidewalks, and occasionally a man came along.

Horses drowsed at the hitch-rails that surrounded the grass plot, flies buzzed and from somewhere in the distance a woman's high voice called indistinctly to a child. Thad Breathea spread his elbows on the rail behind him.

The pattern about the plaza began to break. A rider leading three horses, came from one of the streets to the south and rode slowly around the square. He stopped just beyond Krespin's cart, dismounted deliberately and stood holding all the horses. He looked at Thad and then toward the brick bank building.

Thad eyed the horses critically. They were good, mightily good, he thought. There were rolled yellow slickers tied behind the cantles of the saddles as though the owners of these horses were traveling, and in one saddle boot a carbine rested, its butt protruding.

From a store building close by the bank a man emerged and stopped to look into the store window; another man coming up the street joined him. A third man walked into the bank, leaving the door open behind him, and down the square toward the south two men appeared casually and stood, looking at the First State. The man holding the horses paid no attention to the two in front of the store, but he stared at the men further down the street. Thad, watching him incuriously, did not note the little stir in the plaza behind him. Then the horse holder turned to Thad and spoke courteously.

"Brother," he said, his voice carrying

a soft drawl. "I got to go get me some tobacco. Would you wind holdin' these horses a minute?" He tendered a handful of reins and Thad accepted them.

"I'll be right back," the fellow drawled. He turned his horse and mounted in one easy, fluid motion. In the saddle he looked down at Thad and grinned; then he trotted along the side of the square and around a corner.

Down the street two men sauntered casually along under the awnings, moving toward Thad. The men who had been looking in the store window had disappeared. One of Thad's horses stamped impatiently and brushed a fly, and a vagrant puff of wind stirred the cottonwoods so that all the leaves rustled.

The quiet was broken by an explosion within the brick bank building. The shot sounded loud and yet with that curious ringing quality that confinement gives to sound. On the heels of that first explosion came two others, sharp and authoritative.

From the saddle shop two men came scrambling out. Another burst from the door of one of the stores. Under the awnings the two loiterers were running and Thad caught the glint of sunlight on metal when they crossed an open space. He was alert now, standing straight, looking to right and left.

From the bank three men dashed, running across the dusty street toward him. One had red hair and a brick red face. They caught the reins from Thad's surprised hand, snatched them away and whirled the horses. The man with the red hair shouted, "Let's go!" Then horses pounded in the plaza and Thad was hidden in a cloud of dust. Something sang thinly and the plaza echoed to the burst of gunfire.

THAD came out of that cloud of dust. He broke from it, running, half blind, unable to see. Guns were still roaring and something plucked sharply at his leg; he felt a burning sensation and stumbled. As he came to his feet again his

arm was grasped viciously and a voice, high and excited, yelled in his ear: "I've got you! Get your hands up!"

Thad whirled to meet that voice. Something smacked against his head, he reeled and went down. When he tried to get up again, there were legs all about him. A boot shoved roughly into his chest sent him back to the ground, and in that babble of voices, one rose, harsh and excited: "This is one of 'em. He held the horses!"

Another voice, deeper and slower, announced, "They shot Dan Oliver." Then hands grasped Thad and he was jerked to his feet.

There were angry faces close to him. Questions were shouted. One high voice kept yelling: "String him up! String him up!" Then a man pushed through the crowd, his smooth tanned face expressionless, reached Thad's side and put his hand on Thad's shoulder.

"This is one of 'em, Charlie," a man announced. "He held their horses. I got him before he could get away."

"I'll take him," the tanned man said, and the quietness of his voice stilled the noise of the others. "Come on, you." The hand on Thad's shoulder shoved him forward.

Thad pulled back. "There's a mistake," he said, his voice so hoarse that he hardly recognized it. "I wasn't with them. A man asked me to hold the horses." His expostulations were lost in a burst of derisive shouts. Still he held back against the pushing hand.

"I'm Thad Breathea!" he shouted. "I wasn't with 'em. Find Dale Krespin! He knows me. I came in with him. I—" Thad stopped. The man holding him was facing the crowd, and in the center of it, Dale Krespin stood.

"Is that right, Mr. Krespin?" the man holding Thad demanded. "Is that right? Did this fellow come to town with you?"

Dale Krespin took a step forward into the little cleared space before Thad and his captor. Krespin's face was a sallow white and his eyes would not meet Thad's.

"I never saw him before in my life," Krespin said flatly. "He didn't come to town with me. I never saw him before!"

CHAPTER IV

TEN HIGH IN TRIUMPH

MR. TEN HIGH CROATES was an opportunist as well as a tinhorn gambler. Confronted with a very ticklish situation in the smoking car of Number Nine, he had seized the opportunity that Thad Breathea's open boot-top afforded him, and rid himself of the three cards he had filched from the deck.

Further than that, when Thad went into action, so did Ten High. He had refrained from pulling his derringer before Thad leaped at Joe, because Joe Pierce was a very tough gentleman indeed and Walt Davis was equally tough.

But Thad's frightened resistance had given Ten High an edge and he took it. He was still holding a gun on the bewildered card players when the brakeman came bursting into the smoker. Ten High whispered, "Ditch it! The con!" and scooping up his winnings with one hand, he hid the derringer with the other.

The brakeman was wrathful. He used some curt and peculiar words from his trainman's vocabulary, and because he was holding a brakeclub and was backed by authority, he was not corrected. When the train started after its brief pause at Redondo, the conductor joined the brakeman and the card game was definitely postponed—not, however, without some promises on the part of Joe Pierce and Walt Davis.

Before leaving the smoker Ten High made a quick survey of his surroundings. Seeing a scrap of white protruding from beneath a seat, he stooped to retrieve it, thinking it was a card. Instead he found two envelopes on the floor, stuck them into his pocket and went on back to the coach, escorted by the fuming brakeman and stern conductor.

When the train stopped at Las Flores, Ten High jauntily cocked his derby over

an eyebrow, resumed his checked coat and left the car, swinging his grip. His assurance was justified because Walt Davis and Joe Pierce were going to Albuquerque.

Las Flores was an old story to Mr. Croates. He had friends there. In great high spirits he proceeded from the depot to the plaza, passed along one side of the square and on down the street.

Before a garishly painted frame building he paused; he briefly inspected the street he had just traversed and then went in the opened door. There was a bar opposite the door and to the left of the bar a cleared space surrounded by an ornately carved piano and a few tables.

"Lulu here?" Croates asked the bartender.

The barman, surveying his visitor with eyes the color of a yolk of egg, nodded briefly. "Out back," he said. "She ain't goin' to be glad to see you, Ten High."

Ten High grinned. "I'll take the chance," he announced, and went through the door and down a hall. Another door confronted him and he paused and knocked. From within a high-pitched voice demanded, "Who's there?" Then, before Croates could answer, the door opened.

The woman who stood in the doorway was big. There was still a kind of blowsy prettiness about her face, but her body was flabby and swollen, her eyes puffed with sleep.

"Oh," the big woman grunted, "it's you, is it?" She went back into the room, seating herself on the bed and brushing back disheveled hair with a plump white hand.

Ten High crossed to a chair, swept a tangle of clothing from it and sat down. "Hello Lulu," he said affably. "How's things?"

"They're hell," Lulu answered succinctly. "We had a party last night and I've got a head like a barrel. An' business is punk. I ain't hardly makin' a living."

"Well," Ten High said cheerfully, "I'll stay for awhile anyhow. My old room?

"No." Lulu did not even lift her head. "I got Pearl in there. She's singin' for me now. You take the room at the end of the hall."

Grinning cheerfully, Ten High gathered up his grip and left the room. In the little cubbyhole at the end of the corridor he pulled off his coat and shirt and washed. Then he lay down on the bed and locked his hands behind his head.

After a while he remembered the envelopes he had retrieved on the train. He sat up and got them from his coat. The first one he opened poured manna into Ten High's hand, and he stared wide eyed at his fortune.

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Croates throatily. "Well, look at this now!"

Counting the money, he found the sum to be one hundred and four dollars. The bills felt smooth and fine under his fingers and he counted them again, not doubting his accuracy but because he liked the feel. Then, having placed the money in a roll in his trousers pocket, he ripped open the second envelope. A folded piece of paper and still another envelope rewarded him and Mr. Croates fell to reading.

He finished the brief letter, extracted a paper from the smaller envelope and perused it. For a moment or two afterward he sat staring at the door; then he jumped up, opened it, and yelled into the hall: "Hey! Lulu!"

RECEIVING no immediate answer, Ten High continued to shout until presently Lulu issued from her room, bare feet padding on the floor. Her raucous voice bade Ten High shut up.

Ten High returned to his bed. When Lulu came in, he was sitting there, holding two pieces of paper, a pleased grin on his face.

"What the devil do you want, Ten High?" Lulu demanded angrily.

Ten High waved the papers. "Sit down," he ordered. "I've discovered a gold mine, Lulu."

"Huh?" said Lulu, and sat down beside Ten High.

"Do you know a man named Dale Krespin?" the gambler demanded.

"He never comes here," Lulu said. "He's a ranchman out east of town. Some of his boys come in sometimes."

"Do you know Jake Breathea?"

Lulu's profanity was heartfelt. "That old devil? Everybody knew him. He lived here four hundred years. He was sheriff when I came here. Was I glad when he died! Krespin was his stepson. Krespin inherited the Breathea place."

"Inherited it, huh?" Ten High grunted. "How much do you think it would be worth to Krespin to keep it?"

"What'll stop him from keeping it?" Lulu demanded. "Krespin was Jake's only heir, wasn't he?"

Ten High shook his head. "Old Jake had a son," he said.

Lulu furrowed her brows in thought. "Yeah," she announced finally, "he did have a boy. They had some trouble. The boy got married an' Jake didn't want him to. I remember somethin' about it now. Carl was the boy's name. He married a girl out of a show company that played here. She died after they were married. Didn't Carl get into some sort of trouble?"

"I don't know about that," Ten High said, "but I know that I can find old Jake's grandson. Carl's dead."

"Well, what of it?" snapped Lulu.

Ten High flourished the letters. "I've got a letter here to Dale Krespin that was written by Carl Breathea," he explained. "Breathea said in the letter that it would be delivered by his son after Carl was dead. I've got it, so I guess Carl's dead all right."

"Breathea asked Krespin to look after the kid and give him a chance. There was another letter in with it that Carl wrote to old Jake. He said in it that he was sorry he hadn't come back to see the old man and that this was his boy bringin' the letter. Now what do you think of that?"

"Where'd you get 'em?" Lulu asked practically.

"Never mind about that," Ten High retorted. "We can use these letters."

Lulu was skeptical. "How?" she demanded.

"Why, Krespin has inherited the Breathea ranch," Ten High said. "Natchully he'll want to keep it. It ought to be worth somethin' to him not to have to split it up with Carl's boy."

Once more Lulu grunted. "You tell me where you got them letters," she commanded.

"Well," Ten High explained, "I got 'em on the train." He completed the tale and looked questioningly at Lulu.

"He must have got off at Redondo," Lulu said, when Ten High had told his story. "You didn't see him at the depot here?"

"No."

"Then he did get off at Redondo. That means that Krespin or somebody from the ranch met him. Your scheme won't work, Ten High."

"Why not?"

Lulu looked witheringly at the little gambler. "Because by now," she grated, "your Thad Breathea boy is sittin' down with his step-uncle eatin' Lazy Five beef, that's why not. You get up an' get your clothes on an' go out an' rustle some business. If you're goin' to stay here you got to earn your keep. An' don't go yellin' for me down the hall an' wakin' everybody up. Don't you think we got to sleep?"

With that Lulu majestically departed, leaving Ten High Croates sitting dejectedly on the bed. He was crestfallen for only a moment, however. His gold mine had proved a gold brick, but he still had one hundred and four dollars profit.

TEN HIGH played a little stud poker that night. He mentioned the attractions of Lulu's establishment to one or two strangers he thought would be interested. He received the unwelcome attention of Charlie Farrel from the sheriff's office, and he reestablished a former liaison with Lon Popples, the town marshal.

In general, Ten High spent a useful and fairly profitable evening. About two o'clock he went to bed and he was still sleeping when, at noon, shots sounded in the plaza of Las Flores. It was not until late in the afternoon that Ten High issued forth once more.

When he reached the plaza men were still standing around in small groups, talking. Ten High, seeking out an acquaintance, asked the cause of the excitement.

"Bank was held up," the man answered. "Brick Mahoney an' two others got away. They caught the man that held the horses. He's in jail."

"Brick, huh?" Ten High queried. He knew Brick Mahoney; he had even played cards once with that redoubtable gentleman.

"Yeah," Ten High's friend drawled. "Funny about the one they caught. He claimed he wasn't with 'em. Said that he'd come to town with Dale Krespin. Krespin was in the crowd and he said that he'd never seen the fellow before. The guy's just a kid."

"Oh," said Ten High. "Good lookin' kid?"

"He's in the jail. You can go see."

"I'll just do that," Ten High agreed, and started toward the courthouse.

Ordinarily Ten High Croates, having occupied several jails, stayed as far away from them as he could. Now he wanted to get into one. The courthouse in Las Flores was off the plaza. Ten High pushed through the crowd which milled about the building, worming his way into the corridor. The corridor was filled and there was a good deal of talking.

"He says that he come to town with Krespin," a man before Ten High stated. "He keeps insistin' on it. Krespin says that he never seen, the kid before. I think the kid was with Brick all right. There's nothin' in it that would make Krespin lie about it."

Ten High squirmed back, stepped on some toes, was cursed, and finally got through the crowd. On the street he set-

bled his hat at a jaunty angle, shrugged his shoulders into the disarranged checked coat, and strolled back to Lulu's. There, without ceremony, he proceeded to waken that astute lady of business.

"So my idea's no good?" Ten High jeered when Lulu was fully awake. "So you don't think we can shake Krespin down, huh?"

"No," Lulu answered stolidly.

"Well, listen to this," Ten High commanded. "Young Thad Breathea is in jail. He's there on a charge of bank robbery an' mebber murder, an' he claims he came to town with Dale Krespin."

"Well?" Lulu questioned.

"Well," Ten High announced triumphantly, "Krespin says he never seen the kid before. Now mebber you'll tell me that Dale Krespin don't want to get rid of that kid an' keep him out of sight."

Lulu arising from her bed, padded to the door and opened it. "Hey," she yelled, "Buster! Bring two bottles of beer down here."

CHAPTER V

DOGIE IN A CELL

THAD BREATHEA spent a miserable afternoon. Hustled to jail, bumped, jostled, cursed, he was thrown into a cell. Charlie Farrel had protected him as best he could, but it was a thoroughly frightened youngster that got up from the floor after the cell door clanged shut, and crept over to the beddingless bunk and sat down.

Bewildered, frightened, he was not let alone even now. Charlie Farrel had already departed to organize a posse to follow the bank robbers, but there were plenty of lawmen left to question Thad, to knock him around and shout at him when he persisted in his story.

Dale Krespin was brought into the sheriff's office where the questioning took place. There, once more confronting Thad, he repeated that he had never set eyes on the boy before and knew nothing of him. The questioning went on and on;

it was not until late in the evening when Farrel had returned from a fruitless chase, that Thad's torment ceased.

Farrel was not the sheriff—Gus Hoffman, fat and politic, held that sinecure—but Charlie Farrel ran the office. He walked in, looked at the men grouped around Thad, pushed through them and reached Thad's side.

"Come on, kid," Charlie Farrel commanded. "We'll get out of here an' they'll let you alone awhile." With that he pulled Thad up out of the chair and escorted him out of the sheriff's office and back to the cell. When Thad was in the cell again, Farrel stood outside and looked through the bars.

"I'll get you somethin' to eat," Farrel told him, "an' when you've kind of got collected we'll talk it over."

"I've told what I know," Thad answered desperately, sensing the kindness and the fairness in the man. "I came to town with Mr. Krespin. I—"

"If you're tellin' the truth you'll be all right," Farrel interrupted. "It don't look like you're tellin' it, though. You think it over."

He walked away and Thad, for the first time that day, was left alone.

Thad ate a little of the food that Farrel sent in and drank part of the coffee. "Farrell said that he'd be in the office if you wanted to talk to him," the turnkey said, and walked off down the corridor, the dishes rattling.

Thad sat on the bunk, his head in his hands. His head ached and his thoughts were going around in an endless procession. They were bitter thoughts and uppermost among them was a question: Why had Dale Krespin lied?

All Krespin had to do was tell the truth and Thad would be out of there. Desperately he cast about for a source that would prove his identity. There was none in Las Flores. He knew no one. One cheering idea came: He would send word back to Wyoming, to plump little Judge Althen, and Althen would come hurrying to his rescue. But aside from that, the

whole business was dark and gloomy. There were bad times ahead and Thad knew it.

The hours dragged by. The clock in the courthouse tower boomed eleven strokes. The jailor, coming down the corridor, peered curiously at Thad; and up in the bullpen a drunk began to cry lugubriously. It was almost more than Thad could bear.

THE tower clock struck twelve . . . one . . . two . . . and then once more there were footsteps in the corridor! Thad looked up. The jailor, walking very stiffly, was coming toward the cell, and behind him was another man. The little procession paused outside the cell and a voice, utterly strange to Thad, said: "Unlock it, Jack."

The key rattled against the cell lock because the jailor's hand was shaking, and Thad saw that the man behind held a gun against the jailor's fat back.

"Come on, kid," the man with the gun directed.

Thad got up from the bunk and took an uncertain step toward the door.

"Come on," the man with the gun urged. "We can't wait forever. Brick's outside."

Thad went through the cell door. As he started down the corridor, he heard the sound of a blow and then the closing of the cell door. Footsteps thumped rapidly behind him and the stranger said: "I slapped him on the head an' threw him inside. I hope that bunk was lousy." A hand pushed against Thad's back and he hurried his step.

The drunk in the bullpen was still wailing as they passed. As they reached the courthouse corridor and started past the sheriff's office, the red-haired man with the brick red face stepped through and closed the door softly.

"You have to hurt him, Brick?" Thad's conductor asked.

"Charlie Farrel?" the red haired man scoffed. "No. Charlie's got sense. He put up his hands an' sat still. I tied him to

his chair an' gagged him. You got the kid all right, Silk?"

"Sure."

Brick was pushing ahead along the corridor. Thad stopped short. "I . . ." he began.

"No time to argue, kid," Brick said cheerfully, catching Thad's arm. "You held our horses for us when that damned Lowell pulled out. We heard they'd got you an' we come back to get you out. Come on."

Once more Thad moved forward.

They passed through the big double doors of the courthouse and Brick whistled softly. A man emerged from the shadows and said:

"Right around here, Brick," and once more Thad was hustled along. In the darkness beside the courthouse Thad could see four horses standing, their heads together. Brick, Silk and the third man each took a horse. "You have any trouble, Brick?" the third man asked.

"Not a bit, Curly," Brick answered. To Thad he said, "Grab those reins and come on, kid."

Thad took the trailing reins of the remaining horse.

The quartet moved stealthily away from the courthouse, Brick in the lead. He seemed to know the path for he twisted and turned corners and kept moving. Presently Brick stopped.

"We can ride now," he said, and mounted. The feel of the saddle under him was good to Thad. The stirrups were a little short but he settled his feet in them and gathered up the reins. The procession started moving.

On they went, dark buildings on either side. At length there were only a scattered few and Brick dropped back beside Thad.

"Now . . ." he began.

Behind them a bell began a mad clamor, booming out a warning. A light flickered in a house, became steady and grew, sending a dull beam through a window. Brick began to laugh even as Silk cursed viciously.

"That damned Charlie Farrel," Brick chuckled, breaking his laughter. "I might of knowed he'd get loose. That's the fire-bell, boys, an' we're goin' to have 'em after us hot an' heavy. Let's do a piece of ridin'."

"Charlie Farrell!" Silk muttered. "I told you, Brick. We should of killed him. He—"

"Oh hell!" Brick scoffed. "Come on, let's go!"

Hoofs ground against gravel. Thad felt his horse bunch under him, muscles gathering, then there came the full surge of power, and the four riders pounded away. And up ahead, clear in the night, ringing out even above the thunder of the bell, came Brick's yell, high and taunting, flinging back a defiance at the law abiding world.

AFTER that first wild yell the four settled down to the business of covering country. Thad had made many a ride but never one like this. The pace was punishing. Thad had no spurs, but his horse kept up with the others. And still, with all their haste, they were cautious.

Brick broke their run when they came to rough ground, threading carefully through it, only to go on again at top speed when they were in smooth country once more. There was no conserving of the horses, and Thad knew the animals could not keep up this pace indefinitely. Yet there was an exhilaration about the flight, a swift pounding of the heart so that the blood rang in Thad's ears and his cheeks were warm with its flow.

The four rode west, making for the hills and the broken country below the hills. The stars told Thad their direction.

When morning broke, cold and gray behind them, they had reached the foothills. The gray sky in the east was streaked with pink and overhead the clouds hung low and forbidding. Cedars dotted the rock strewn slopes they traversed for awhile. Then they were going down a slope and below them lay a rock shack, its roof broken in and a corral close by. There

were horses in the corral, and Brick reined in.

"Tony got here with the horses," he said, and his horse, moving once again, sent rocks rattling down the slope.

They changed horses in the corral. Thad gathered from the talk that these fresh mounts had been moved here from a previous hiding place. Brick expressed his satisfaction at finding the animals waiting, but Silk growled: "He ought to have moved 'em; we paid him enough," and went on with his saddle changing.

Curly, the first to get his saddle changed, hazed their tired horses out of the corral and drove them down the little canyon, disappearing from sight. When he returned, his three companions mounted and rode on. Neither Brick nor Silk spoke, and Thad gathered that all was according to some prearranged plan.

They went up now, moving more leisurely. The sun came out briefly and then hid behind the clouds. They were out of the foothills and in the mountains proper and still they climbed. Then Brick turned from the trackless canyon and entered a clump of trees. Thad, following him with the others, found that they were in a little rincon, the rocks rising sheer around them. Brick had dismounted, and he grinned up at Thad as the boy reined in.

"Light down, kid," Brick directed. "We'll stay here awhile."

Thad climbed down from his horse. He had no idea of how many miles they had covered. Silk was moodily moving off, leading his horse, and Curly was tying his mount to a tree.

"It's goin' to rain," Brick said with satisfaction. "That's what it's goin' to do."

"An' we'll get damned wet," Curly complained.

"We're going to stay here?" Thad demanded.

"Till night, kid," Brick answered cheerfully. He caught the question in Thad's eyes and went on.

"We haven't come far enough yet," he

explained. "There'll be men out lookin' for us. If we move they stand a chance of seein' us but if we stay still . . ." Brick shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's a big country an' this is just one spot in it," he concluded.

That was Thad's first lesson. He stood still while he digested it. "They can trail us," he suggested.

Even the morose Silk who had come up to join them, grinned at that. "It'd take an Apache to trail us in the hills, kid," Silk said. "We rode east an' swung back. Where was you when we crossed the river? Wasn't you along?"

Thad remembered the stream they had splashed through, and kept silent. Here was another lesson.

"An' there's more than one way out of here an' either Curly or Silk or me will be watchin'," Brick added. "Satisfied, kid?"

Thad had no answer.

Curly pulled a Winchester from his saddle-boot and went off among the trees. Silk and Brick busied themselves untying the slickers from their saddles. "We didn't have time to get you a slicker, kid," Brick said. "We just picked the best horse we could find an' stole him for you."

Again Thad had nothing to say.

THERE was cold food in Silk's slicker. Thad ate some of it. Brick and Silk wolfed down the meat and the bread, and Silk took a portion of it out to Curly. When he came back, he stretched himself out beside his yellow oilskin. Brick sat with his back against the bole of a pine and eyed Thad.

"What was the trouble, kid?" he asked suddenly. "Why didn't you run?"

"I didn't know what was happening," Thad answered honestly.

Brick laughed. Silk sat up and stared at Thad. "How come you had the horses?" Silk asked.

"A man gave them to me to hold," Thad said. "I was standing by the hitch-rail and he said he had to get some tobacco and asked me to hold them."

"Hoyt Lowell, damn him!" Silk growled. "He got cold feet an' pulled out on us. Somebody told the men at the bank, an' they were watchin' for us."

"But the kid held the horses an' we're all here," Brick said. "What's your name, kid?"

"Thad Breathea," Thad answered.

"Yo're in good company," Brick laughed. "I'm Brick Mahoney an' that's Silk Gerald, an' Curly Winter's watchin' the back trail."

"Why did you come back for me?" Thad asked.

"Ask Brick," Silk answered. There was something in his voice that Thad could not explain.

Brick scowled at Silk. "We got connections in town," he said briefly. "We heard that the man who held our horses was in jail an' we come back an' got you out. That's all there is to it." He was still scowling at Silk.

Silk turned over so that his back was toward Brick and Thad. Presently the frown left Brick's face and he turned again to Thad. "The fellow that told us about you said that there was some kind of a jackpot," he announced. "What happened, kid?"

His voice was not unkind.

Thad answered briefly. "I came to town with Dale Krespin. When they arrested me I said that Krespin knew me an' that he could tell them who I was. He said he'd never seen me before."

"After you'd come to town with him?" There was incredulity in Brick's blue eyes.

Thad nodded.

"He must of had it in for you," Brick said after a moment's reflection. "Well, you're out of jail now."

"Are you fellows goin' to talk all day?" Silk snarled. "Damn it! I want some sleep."

Brick scowled at Silk's back but after a moment he said to Thad: "Might as well take a nap." He stretched out on the ground.

Thad lay down, but he knew he was too excited to sleep. There were too

many thoughts milling in his head, too many problems to solve. Why had Dale Krespin lied back there in Las Flores? Why had these men come back and taken him out of jail? Why . . . ?

CHAPTER VI

OUTLAW, HERE'S YOUR GUN

RAIN, a fine drizzle in his face, awakened Thad. Brick was under a pine, his slicker gathered about him; Curly was under another. Thad moved into the shelter of a tree. Neither Brick nor Curly offered to share his oilskin. Silk, Thad surmised, was out watching the back trail.

Thad shivered. The rain was cold and the wind was throwing it under the pine. He moved around so that his back was against the bole of the tree, the trunk sheltering him from the rain. Water dripped soggily from the pine needles.

It was mid-afternoon when Silk came in, and Thad was soaked through by this time. Brick and Curly had been sitting together. Once in a while they spoke, so low voiced that Thad could not hear them. Silk walked over to them and squatted down.

"No need of waitin' any longer," he said. "It's rainin' all over the world. If they'd picked up the trail they'd have showed up by now. We might as well move."

"We might as well," Brick agreed. "Let's go. Come on, kid."

"Now wait a minute!" Curly's voice was high with suppressed excitement. "The kid ain't goin' to go no further with us."

Brick turned so that he faced Curly. "I say that he is," Brick said levelly.

"Curly's right, Brick," Silk put in. "I was fool enough to go with you last night when we got the kid out. I ain't a fool today."

Brick turned and scowled at Curly. "The kid done us a favor," he said. "We'd of been butchered in the plaza if it hadn't been for the kid. I say—"

"We got him out of the *juzgado* an' we

brought him along so far," Curly growled. "It was damned foolishness in the first place, but I stuck with you. The kid don't go any further. Here's where we split up, Brick. You can stick with the kid."

"All right then!" Brick was very angry. "I stick with the kid. To hell with you two!"

Thad got up from his pine tree and walked over to the others. He stood, looking down at Brick and Silk and Curly. "You don't need to look after me," he said. "I can get along."

"You see, Brick?" Curly said.

Brick was looking intently at Thad. His broad red face was blank and there was a gleam in his blue eyes. "These two guys would turn you loose, kid," he said. "They'd let you ride down an' get thrown in jail again."

"But all I did was hold your horses," Thad protested. "I didn't know what was going on."

"Kid," Brick's voice was grave, "we're on the dodge now. There was a man shot back there in that bank." He stopped and looked steadily at Curly. Curly averted his eyes. "Mebbe," Brick continued, looking once more at Thad, "we done the wrong thing when we took you out of jail. I don't know. But all hell couldn't make Charlie Farrel an' them others believe that you wasn't with us now. Not after we come back an' got you out, they wouldn't believe it."

"I don't give a damn," Curly said. "I ain't goin' to drag a green kid around over these hills. I won't do that."

He got up and walked over to his horse. Untying the animal from its tree he led him out into the little opening. "You comin', Silk?" Curly demanded.

Silk looked at Brick, then at Thad. Brick said nothing. Suddenly Silk's face hardened, but he did not speak. He turned and strode over to his own horse.

"I ain't that kind of skunk," Brick announced gruffly as though answering a question. "Go on then!"

Silk and Curly mounted. Without looking back they rode out through the trees.

WHEN they were gone Brick turned to Thad. "An' that leaves you an' me," he announced grimly, "an' we might as well move on, kid. We can get out of the wet anyhow."

"You can go with them," Thad said simply.

Brick Mahoney's hand clamped down on Thad's shoulder. "You'll do, kid," Brick announced. "I knew you'd do when I seen you. I wouldn't trade you for a half-dozen like them two."

Dropping his hand from Thad's shoulder, he walked across the clearing to where his horse was tied. He moved the animal out from the tree, twisted out a stirrup and went half into the saddle. Then he got down again and began to fumble at one of the saddle-pockets behind his cante.

"I blame' near forgot this," Brick said, opening the saddle pocket.

Thad, who had untied his own horse, was watching. Brick was pulling something from the saddle-pocket, a long length of leather. Thad saw that it was a gun-belt and that there was a holster on it. Brick reached into the saddlebag again and brought out a gun. Placing the weapon in the holster, he came over to Thad and held out the gun and belt.

"You don't want to go runnin' around these hills naked, kid," Brick told him. "I picked this up in Charlie Farrell's office. Thought that you might use it."

Thad took the belt and looked at it. The gun was a Bisley Colt and there were shells in the belt loop. Thad could tell from the shells that the Bisley was a 32-20.

"Put it on, kid," Brick ordered. "It ought to be a good gun. It belonged to Charlie."

Thad latched the gunbelt about his middle. Then both of them mounted. With Mahoney leading, the two set off out of the rincon, not following the path that Silk and Curly had taken, but angling off toward the north. When they were through the trees, Brick dropped back beside Thad.

"We'll hit for Branch Long's place," he

announced. "We can hole up there tonight an' mebbe tomorrow. Anyhow we'll be out of the rain."

Thad, wet and cold and miserable, did not answer Brick. Any place where there was a fire and hot food would suit Thad.

They rode on north, holding about even with the hills, dividing the distance between the mountains and the valley through which the railroad crawled. When the day waned, Thad was chilled through and exhausted. His face, normally a ruddy tan, changed until its color approximated that of blue cornmeal. Brick, glancing at his companion, was alarmed.

"Cold, kid?" he asked. "Want my slicker?"

"There's no need of both of us getting wet," Thad answered dully. "I'm warm enough now anyhow."

It was true. The cold seemed to leave him now; instead, burning flashes shot through his body. Brick reached out and touched Thad's hand. It was hot as fire.

"Just a little further," Brick encouraged. "Stick it out, kid."

Thad made no reply. He held his saddlehorn with both hands and looked straight ahead. Brick Mahoney's red face wrinkled in an anxious frown as he sent his horse along.

AT DUSK, with Thad still in the saddle, Brick followed a canyon into the hills. He was more cheerful now. He had been worried, for he knew that he had a sick boy on his hands. But Thad had toughed it out and they were close to their destination.

The big canyon forked into three tines and Brick, choosing the left-hand fork, forded the little stream that came down the canyon and took a dim trail west. Within a mile he stopped his horse and said cheerfully: "Here we are, kid."

Thad opened his eyes. In the dusk and the rain he could see very little. Brick was pulling at his hands, unlocking them from their grip on the saddlehorn. Brick helped Thad down from his horse. Thad was conscious of a light that danced and

jumped, seemingly in big distances, and then a man carrying a lantern was beside Brick and talking to him.

Everything was jumbled in Thad's mind. He felt rather than understood the things that had been happening to him. The torture of long riding. The cold. The rain. The soreness of his body. And now the confused murmur of two voices—Brick's and the others.

Utterly weary, Thad did not hear what was said. He stood, legs spread wide, head sunk forward, swaying on his feet. Then he felt Brick's thick arm under his shoulders; his reluctant legs were moving and Brick was saying, "Come on, kid. Come on."

Brick must have been helping him, he thought afterward. But at the time things were pretty badly blurred. It didn't matter anyhow.

Thad's legs seemed to carry him without any volition of his own. He stumbled over a step and was in a firelit room and Brick was lowering him to a bunk. Thad wanted to lie down on the bunk, but Brick wouldn't let him. He became very annoyed with Brick, who pulled at his sodden clothing and at his boots, and jerked him around. Then Brick said, "All right; lie down," and the warm comfort of blankets engulfed Thad.

Brick said, "Plumb played out," the words a confused murmur to the boy on the bunk. Then Thad heard no more, for he slept.

And slept deeply, without dreams; how long, he was never sure.

When he wakened there was daylight. Rain beat steadily on a roof and dripped down from the eaves. Thad, by turning his head a trifle, could see a window through which the dim light came and the rain dripping outside the window. At the end of his bunk his clothes were piled. There was his suit, the suit he had bought so proudly in Fort Blocker only five days ago. Was it only five days? It seemed much longer.

His hat lay on the suit, and the gun and belt that Brick had given him

dangled from the end post of the bunk. He had no use for any of those things now, he reflected. Scarcely had any interest in them, scarcely cared whether he would ever use them again.

There was a fireplace across the room, decorated by a smoke-stained spider; and Brick Mahoney, a cigarette in his hand, crouched beside the fireplace and looked steadily toward the opposite side. Following that steady gaze, Thad saw a man standing, leaning against the log wall. He was smoking and staring intently at Brick.

A hard looking customer, that man. His face, as he watched Brick, was ugly, insolent. His hand lingered near a loosely-holstered gun, at his hip.

"An' that's the size of it, Kettleman," Brick was saying. "The kid played out an' I had to get him in."

Kettleman spoke smoothly. "So you ditched yore pals an' stuck with a dogie kid. That's kind of like you, Mahoney—ditchin' yore pals."

Thad moved uneasily.

"I never went back on a man in my life," Brick snapped. The firelight on his face made it redder than ever. "You know I never did, Kettleman. Silk an' Curly rode off an' left us. If anybody did any ditchin' it was them."

"Silk will be glad to hear that," Kettleman drawled.

Brick said:

"I'd as soon tell them as I would you."

THERE was a noise further back in the room. Moving his head a little more, Thad saw another man seated on a box beside a table. He was small, dark and with a pinched face. The man rocked on the box and watched Brick and Kettleman.

He did not seem happy.

"You just about got a water haul at the bank," Kettleman mused. "You lost yore grip, Mahoney."

"Somebody tipped 'em off at Las Flores," Brick said. "They acted like they expected us. An' if it hadn't been for the kid

Lowell would of left us afoot. He seen what was comin' an' run."

Thad stirred. Kettleman's eyes were little and bright as he looked at the bunk. "Yore friend's awake now," he announced. "There's nothing to keep you here, Mahoney."

"There's nothin' to make me go," Brick said defiantly. "We're welcome here, ain't we, Branch?"

"Why, Brick"—the small man got up from the box—"you know—"

"Don't try to shove it off on Branch!" Kettleman snapped. "Branch has nothin' to say about it."

"An' it's his place too." Brick looked steadily at Kettleman.

"Just the same you won't stay."

Thad moved on the bunk. All his muscles protested as he sat up; his eyes burned and his arms ached as he pushed back the bedding.

"Lie down, kid!" Brick was on his feet, moving toward the bunk. "You played out last night. Lie down."

"Get yore clothes on, kid." Kettleman's voice was cold. "Yo're leavin'."

Brick whirled to face Kettleman. Thad sat still on the bunk, the bedding across his naked knees. "I thought this was Branch's place," Brick said evenly. "Mebbe I was mistaker, Kettleman. Mebbe you own it!"

There was a tension in the room that Thad could feel, a tightening almost to the breaking point. Kettleman was glar-

ing at Brick, and Brick had moved back until he was almost against the wall.

"I hold this place down," Kettleman said. "You knew I held it down. Yo're tryin' to rub it into me, Mahoney."

"I didn't know you claimed Branch's place or I'd not of come here," Brick said. "You wasn't here last night when we come in. Now you come along an' tell me that yo're the big bull in this pasture. You don't look too big, Kettleman."

"I'm big enough to tell you to leave," Kettleman answered harshly.

"Nobody," Brick's voice was quiet, "tells me what I've got to do. Nobody, Kettleman. I'll back that any way you want."

The tension broke. Kettleman moved like a released spring, so swiftly that to Thad's eyes the movement was a blur. Thad heard Branch Long's box go over, and jerked his head around. Long was under the table, his mouth open. His yell was lost in the crash of sound.

Brick stood beside the fireplace, leaning against its rocks. He held a gun in his hand and his left arm dangled limp. In front of the fireplace Kettleman lay, face down, one arm thrown out before him. Just at the tip of his hand was a gun. As Thad watched, Kettleman's fingers closed as though he would grip the weapon, and then relaxed.

Brick took a step forward and stood looking down at Kettleman. His voice was strange, hoarse and tight and hard.

"By damn! He asked for it!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Help Kidneys Pass 3 Pints a Day

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Kidneys remove excess acids and poisonous waste from your blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. ADV.

Don't Look Now

By MAURICE BEAM

Author of "The Wind Won't Tell," "Death in the Luminous Earth," etc.

Mouse was a little, furtive man, scurrying about the back alleys of the underworld. He was a heel; but he had a dream, and he followed that dream to a special kind of glory—with his eyes closed

THE amount was forty thousand dollars to a penny. The street was a dead-ender not far from La Salle. The bank messenger carrying the money was J. A. Covington, a compact, self-reliant man of thirty-eight, an employee of the bank for seventeen years. Surviving him were his widow, Ruth, and three children: Harold, nine; Hilda, seven, and Robert, five. The papers printed pictures of them—homely, pleasant people, faces blank with grief.

Covington couldn't have realized the attack. The bullet, entering his head from behind, felled him instantly. Two of the bandits jumped from the sedan and one of them shot Covington while the other seized the bag containing the currency. The third bandit, driver of the car, swerved in and the others leaped aboard. Then the sedan whirled away in traffic. It was over in ninety seconds.

The police knew exactly what the newspapers knew.

"It is no ordinary crime," cried the mayor. "Don't make the mistake of see-



The things you could hear through open dumb-waiter doors would put men on spots

ing it that way. Covington—hard-working, a family man—shot down on a crowded street in broad daylight. It's unthinkable. It has aroused the people of this town as no crime has since—"

The chief said, "We're doing everything possible. "We'll get them." The mayor shouted, "With no leads, no clues?"

"We're questioning all parolees, ex-cons, suspects—everyone we lay hands on with even a hint of a holdup record." The chief spoke desperately.

"Routine won't be enough," snapped the mayor. "You've got to find these men. You've got to, or—"

"Yes, sir," said the chief.

Half an hour later the chief was snarling, "It's in your district, Moffett, and I'm holding you personally responsible. Haven't you anything, aside from this riff-raff you're putting through the mill? Can't you find anyone who saw them?"

The captain's forehead glistened. "That's the devil of it. Hundreds of people on the street, but we can't locate a soul who got more than a glimpse."

"Where was the patrolman?"

"Mullane. He was a block away, approaching. A minute more and he'd have spotted them. As it was—people screaming told him. He came on the run, blowing his whistle. There were five cops on the spot in two minutes. They couldn't find anybody who actually saw their faces; only the name of the sedan and that there were three men in it."

The chief slapped the table. "A Rambler! All we know is—the sedan was a black Rambler. There's thousands of Ramblers. Bah! Now listen, Captain, we'll find that car and we'll find those killers!"

"Yes sir," said the captain.

"We're the goats," he was saying ten minutes afterward. "His Honor and the chief are spreading pressure and most of it's on us. They're turning the department upside down, canceling leaves, pulling men off other stuff. Good Lord! Doesn't Mullane remember anything? Didn't anybody see them?"

The lieutenant shook his head. "It's got to be a general manhunt," he said. "Pigeons—"

"And the man with the most contacts here—"

"Sergeant Hurd. Twenty years in this precinct."

"Get him," ordered the captain. "We'll comb the nest of every grifter in our district. Let the others do the same."

MANY such nests for years have been hidden along half-mile radii of a circle whose center is the intersection of Glassford and Engel Streets, a region of small hotels, rooming-houses, all-night

drug-stores and restaurants with long, glistening imitation-marble counters.

In one of the smaller, cheaper rooming-houses on Engel, half a block from Glassford, lived Mouse Eggleston. A slender, rather jaunty man was Mouse who, despite his neatness of dress and an air of respectability reflected by the gold-tipped pen-and-pencil set in his breast pocket, always managed to appear nondescript. His age—somewhere from thirty-five to forty-five—was as ambiguous as his physical type. Yet a type he was, in a manner as gray and obscure as the name by which he was known. And as his occupations.

Mouse's occupations over the fifteen-year period of his city residence had begun in honest light but had quickly entered and remained in devious shadow. Once he was a waiter. For a time he was table attendant in a poolroom. Throughout a summer he was night-clerk in a lobbyless hotel.

Then gradually these jobs palled as he learned of other opportunities which fitted his cunning and his inborn love of secrecy. Thereafter, for varying intervals, he had applied himself to selling opium in small boxes called "toys," to practicing the art of the "hyper" or short-change artist, to acting as lookout for sneak-thieves on petty robberies, to systematic shoplifting of light merchandise.

Now, however, all this was in the past. After two minor convictions and a total of eighteen months in county jail, Mouse Eggleston had at last emerged prepared for his role in life. He became a police informer.

There were several excellent reasons why Mouse stuck to his new duties. One was the matter of a suspended sentence which his superiors often reminded him about; the other was the fact that he was being taken care of financially by ward heelers. The financial care was not munificent but it was ample, for Mouse Eggleston was a single man of frugal habits. He was a contented man, too—until Hazel Nydegger became a threat to his self-satisfaction.

Hazel Nydegger was a waitress in the

Greek restaurant on Engel near Glassford. There Mouse ate his meals. Gradually, seeing her daily, he was mastered by a novel sensation. Without actually naming it, with no thought of the word "love," he came to realize that at last he was hooked. He wanted Hazel Nydegger as he had never wanted any woman.

To his rapt gaze the slightly blowsy, blondined hair of Hazel was a halo of innocence; her tired, flintily suspicious eyes concealed a potential light of tenderness; her figure, which to another man might have appeared thin was, to Mouse, lithely rounded; her hard, brittle laughter seemed altogether musical and charming. As for her inept sarcasms, Mouse understood them for what they were—a defense against the deceit and cupidity of the world.

ON THE evening of the day of the Covington murder-robbery, Mouse Eggleston sat munching his dinner at the counter in the Greek's. As he chewed his eyes were glued to a newspaper. He was nervous. Sergeant Hurd had sent for him and he knew the reason. This Covington job had the department screwy. It had the cops mad. And when the cops, meaning Sergeant Hurd, got mad, Mouse became nervous.

Hurd knew a great deal about the human fauna which flourished in the vicinity of Glassford and Engle; and thus he could estimate accurately how much Mouse ought to know. If the knowledge fell short, Hurd was likely to become rough. Just now it was short. Mouse knew nothing about the Covington job except what he read. Moreover, the bank was offering a reward of two thousand dollars.

Mouse turned presently from the headlines to the back section of the paper and began to read the classifieds. There was but one other customer in the Greek's at the moment and after serving him Hazel came sauntering back, wiping the counter negligently. In her starched white uniform, only slightly soiled, she seemed attractive and domestic to Mouse.

"Here's another one, honey," he said,

and she stopped, staring down upon him haughtily.

"Another what, big shot?"

He flattened the paper on the counter, finger pointing at an ad under the heading, Business Opportunities.

Cafe, 16 stools, comb. with filling-station, main blvd. country, liv. qtrs. Ideal for couple tired of city. \$500 req. Write M-41.

Hazel read it and then said, "P-s-s-t!" disdainfully. "Who says I'm tired of the city? And you! What'd you use for money? Listen, sonny boy, when I get ready to sling hash in the sticks, I'll wire you. You and a couple of other guys."

Mouse grinned delightedly at the pointless witticism. He had shown her many ads like this; about little places in the country where two could make a living. She sneered, sure, but in her eyes he had caught a hint of interest. Some day he'd think of the right thing to say to her. A little joint on the highway, hamburgers and steaks, with living quarters, maybe a gas station, maybe chickens, anyway a little car, with rooms the sun could shine into. Hazel could cook and serve. He'd help clean up, be handy man. Some day he'd talk her into it, make her see it as he did.

"Don't worry about the dough," he now said confidently.

She laughed metallically and went to the front as the customer got up. At the same moment the door opened and another man came in from the street. Mouse's grin faded. The customer went out and the newcomer sat down two stools away. Mouse nodded and the other spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"Quinn wants to see you."

Mouse started. "Me? What about, Fenn?"

"What do you care? He wants to, that's all. Beat it."

"Sure, Fenn." Mouse licked his lips rapidly and began cutting into his meat.

Hazel came to the counter and stood smiling down upon Fenn. Fenn brought out a toothpick and began cleaning his

fingernails. He talked up at Hazel without raising his eyes. His hands, Mouse noted, trembled slightly.

"How's th' steak, sweetheart?"

"It's real good today, Larry," she answered with coyness that made Mouse wince. Fenn, the gorilla! She called him Larry!

"Gimme a porterhouse, rare, sweetheart, and hurry it up, will you?" Hazel, seeing Mouse's eyes, tightened her lips and flounced away, returning with a glass of water for Fenn. Fenn tossed it off hurriedly, then growled at Mouse.

"Quinn's waitin,' you."

"Sure. Sure." Mouse gobbled his food. Fenn fished out a cigarette and lit it. Hazel disappeared through the swinging doors into the kitchen. Fenn swung toward Mouse.

"You heard anything?"

"About what?"

"This shootin,' punk. Covington. There's a roundup on. Any cops been here?"

Mouse stared at him. "I ain't seen any," he said defensively, but inside he was suddenly white and frightened. He had never been suspected of being a rat. "Why?"

"Beat it," said Fenn sullenly. "Didn't I tell you Quinn's waitin'?" Fenn's brilliant black eyes were as cold as buttons. His face was dark with beard.

Mouse got up, leaving his meal unfinished. He put his check and money on the counter near the cash-register and went out without seeing Hazel. He walked to the corner, down Glassford, and back through an alley parallel with Engel. He stepped cautiously through a hole in a back fence and made his way into the rear entrance of the house on Engel Street.

QUINN was pacing up and down in a room on the second floor, a gaunt, heavy-boned man, red-haired, with skin that was white except upon his equine face where it was mottled and ugly. His eyes were nearly colorless. He locked the door.

"Where'd you see Fenn?" he asked as

Mouse recovered his breath from the climb up the steep rear stairs.

Mouse told him.

"In th' Greek's? Eatin'?" Quinn swore and sat down on the bed, his pale eyes fixed. "Any cops around the joints?" he shot out.

"Not that I know of—"

"Not that you know of! Don't give me that, lamb-brain. You'd know it." Quinn was vindictive. He was frightened. It couldn't be anything else. It couldn't be that he suspects anything about me, Mouse thought frantically, for the fear of discovery was always with him.

"Sure, George," he said. "There ain't been a soul around. Why?"

"Why?" Quinn's gaze deepened. "You seen no squads, nobody?"

Mouse shook his head. "You ought to wise me," he said quite calmly.

Quinn glowered. "Nothin.' I'm just askin'." He pulled his necktie loose. There was a streak of grease on the back of his hand. Under the utterly cold eyes Mouse's back twitched. Quinn wasn't subtle. He was tough, a killer. He said rapidly, "Fenn's the only one knows where I am. I want you to bring me up eats. In a sack. Get the Greek to wrap it in napkins. Be sure it's clean. Come in the back way."

"Sure." Mouse remembered: Big George Quinn was fastidious about food. "When?"

"Now," snapped Quinn. "Not a bite since morning. I want swiss steak and french fries. It'll be good and dark in another fifteen minutes. Come in the back. The dumb-waiter."

"Sure." Mouse glanced toward a corner of the high-ceilinged room which contained a shaft of a dumb-waiter. This tawdry rooming-house had once been a mansion of wealth in the old days when Chicago was younger.

"Git me a paper."

Quinn got up and went with him to the door. "Nobody knows where I am but Fenn," he repeated pointedly. "And now you."

"Sure," Mouse said and went out. He

entered the Greek's through the kitchen. The Greek, fat, oily, perpetually smiling at nothing, was busy at his stove. Under his feet the white-and-black checkerboard linoleum was spotted and scarred.

"Hokay, boy hokay. Swiss to go," the Greek said merrily when Mouse gave him Quinn's order.

Mouse went through into the restaurant. Fenn was wiping his plate with a piece of bread. He glanced up and his dark eyes had the shrewd, blank expression of a monkey's. He kept peering restlessly toward the front and each time the kitchen door opened he looked in that direction. Mouse, noting every move he made, was outwardly indifferent. He sat down on a stool. Hazel came and stood over him.

"You want the rest of your dinner?" she asked shortly.

"Just coffee," he said and was inwardly joyful at this token of her thoughtfulness. Then she shrugged and turned away. When she brought the steaming cup he began stirring it idly but with an odd inward concentration. For the moment he forgot Hazel.

HE WAS thinking of what he knew and the worth of what he knew. The facts did not entirely harmonize with his conjectures. Here was Fenn sitting openly in a restaurant. Fenn was a fool yet not altogether stupid. Quinn was hiding. Could it be that they had been involved in the Covington job?

They worked together, of course, but never at anything of greater magnitude than a gas-station stickup or slugging pedestrians. There had been three men on the Covington job. Besides—

Mouse's head barely moved as Fenn got up. Someone had pushed open the swinging doors and was beckoning. Mouse caught a glimpse of a face. The face disappeared. Fenn tossed a dollar bill toward Hazel and walked quickly to the kitchen. Mouse stirred his coffee, trying to keep his hand from shaking. The face had been that of Tony Machetti! Machetti, from the West Side, was big-time! He had been

a machine-gunner for Torrio. He had inside connections, and he was smart.

Mouse hurried to the kitchen doors and through them. He called loudly to the Greek: "My order ready?"

"Is all set." The Greek was wrapping napkins around a plate.

Two men were standing near the back door. They glared at Mouse. Machetti barked, "Who the hell's this?"

"What d'y want?" Fenn growled.

Mouse indicated the wrapped plate. "You know," he said steadily. Now he was sure. This was Machetti. The thin figure, the long face, the cavernous chest, the broken nose—these had been pictured in newspapers too often to be mistaken.

Fenn said suddenly, "It's all right." Then he and Machetti went out the door. Mouse took the tray and, after a moment, followed them. Outside he waited. A car started in the alley and moved along until it stopped behind Quinn's rooming-house. Mouse followed slowly. When he reached it he saw it was a cab, empty.

He went on, into the basement. Balancing the tray on one hand he groped for a light at the end of a hanging wire. In a corner of the damp, smelly room he opened the dumb-waiter shaft. The platform was down. Setting the tray solidly upon it, he pulled a rope and lifted it. There was practically no sound. Quinn had oiled the pulleys and the rope was new.

When Mouse got back to the Greek's it was nearly eight o'clock. His appointment with Hurd was at nine. Hazel was folding napkins, sitting at the counter in the rear. She chewed gum rhythmically as her hands moved. Mouse drew a cup of coffee from the big urn. He slid onto a stool beside Hazel.

"Who was the guy in back?" she asked.

"I don't know. I didn't see anybody, honey."

"You went back there," she said accusingly. "My, but you're mysterious. Fenn went with him, out the alley, eh?"

"I guess so." He resented her interest in Fenn. "Listen, honey." He sounded

suddenly insistent. "Why don't we blow out of here? I know a place not far from Momence. There's a little house in back, a separate house, and a restaurant spot in front. It's on route 46. There's a place to raise stuff. In summer we wouldn't need to buy a vegetable—"

"Gardens! What do you know about gardens?" She was studying his face, her eyes narrowed. "You'd make a swell farmer."

"I was born and raised in a small town," Mouse said excitedly. "When I was a kid we used to have a garden."

"Humph!" Hazel tossed her tight, shining curls. "You don't look like no farmer to me." She was still watching him with an inward gaze of curiosity he had seen before, as if she waited an answer to an unasked question. "Anyway, people don't sell out their places for nothing," she concluded.

"You'll see! I'll get the dough!" Mouse's voice lifted. She wasn't laughing at him.

"Yah? What's your system? Robbin' a bank?"

She was kidding, sure, but she didn't mean it. He laughed happily. "Leave that to Fenn," he blurted boldly, thoughtlessly.

Hazel left off folding napkins. "Yah? Well, maybe it's a good way to get dough. Anyway, he's got it?"

"How do you know?"

"I saw it. A roll that would choke a steer." Her mouth shut, then she added in sudden anger. "Fenn 'wouldn't like no cracks like you just made."

"I was jokin'," Mouse told her quickly, worried about her rapid change of mood. The worry goaded him to say with impulsive bitterness, "Sounds like you're going for Fenn."

She tossed her head once more. "What's it to you, big shot?" She was not displeased. She was grinning tentatively. He took heart and was about to speak when a customer came in and Hazel got up.

AT EIGHT-THIRTY Mouse approached Hazel as she polished the coffee urn. He said, "I'll be back around

ten. What say we go up and watch the dance marathon at the Coliseum?" He tried to sound casual. Once or twice he had taken her to a movie and walked with her to the place where she lived, but he had never asked for a late date, like this.

She swung about, rubbing the wiping rag between veined, pink hands. "Nothin' doin'," she snapped, and cruelly, "Fenn's gonna drop in later. He asked me to go over to Louis' cocktail place. Drinks there are fifty cents per."

Mouse stared at her. Then, swallowing hard, he mumbled, "I get it," and went out.

At five to nine he reached a dark corner on the West Side, two miles from Engel. A saloon stood at an alley intersection. He came inside a dimly lighted room lined with dining booths in the rear of the saloon. Hurd was alone in the booth farthest from the door.

Mouse sat down gingerly opposite him. For half a minute the sergeant went on cleaning the barrel of a revolver with three pipe-cleaners. Then he put the gun away and threw the cleaners on the floor. He was fattish, blond, with a large hooked nose. He was smoking a cigarette which looked minute between his heavy lips.

"Spill it," he said suddenly to Mouse.

"I got nothing definite yet. I got to have some time."

"I don't want alibis," Hurd growled warningly. "I won't stand for alibis. Not on this one. I have a notion to call up Judge Hayward and have your sentence invoked." He cursed volubly. "I ought to beat the living hell out of you."

"Give me a chance," wailed Mouse, cringing as Hurd lifted a hand, for Hurd had a habit of slapping without warning, slapping hard enough to daze.

"To turn in a lot of punks?" he asked threateningly. "A lot of dopes, hypers, shoplifters? I don't want 'em. I want stickup guys. I want the guys who killed Covington."

"Sure, Covington."

"Who was busy today around Glassford and Engel?" Hurd calmed a little.

"Quinn and Fenn," said Mouse cautiously, "but I don't know for sure."

"There's an order out for both of them," said Hurd, "but I was holding off the pickup till I heard from you. How about Harry Lutes and this guy they call the 'ribbon bandit'? What's his name?"

"Tommy Bell," said Mouse. "He lives at the Roanoke on Glassford. But I haven't seen him or Lutes for three days."

"What about Quinn?" Hurd was interested.

Mouse gave a brief account of Quinn's apparent nervousness and how he was hiding out. He felt momentarily secure because Hurd's hands were busy lighting another cigarette. He finished with, "What about this two grand the bank's offering as reward?" Saying it, he was set to duck one of Hurd's unpredictable blows.

The sergeant said, reasonably, "You got a chance at it. Cops aren't eligible anyhow." Then, more sharply, "But to get it you've got to give us real evidence, evidence that'll burn these no-goods and recover the money they grabbed. We don't want hearsay."

"I know."

"You know! You don't know enough to keep your feet dry, you lousy chiseler," said Hurd vindictively and his hand shot out with no warning whatever. Mouse was knocked sidewise in his seat and his head struck the side of the booth. Hurd gripped the shoulders of his coat and lifted him upright. Mouse cried, "Cut it out! Aw, cut it out," and put his hands over his face. Hurd released him. "Now talk! Who was Quinn with beside Fenn?"

"Tony Machetti," cried Mouse, and he told of seeing Machetti.

"Why didn't you say so?"

"I said I've got nothing definite. That isn't evidence."

"You're right," Hurd answered agreeably. "What else?"

"That's all."

"Beat it then. But listen—" Mouse sidled out of the booth and stood near the table, rubbing his temple. "Before midnight give me a ring at home. You know

my number. I want to know where the three of them go. If they're in this, they'll lam."

"You won't send a lot of cops in to spoil it?"

"No, I won't," Hurd promised. "We'll co-operate."

"I'll do my best," Mouse said virtuously, "but it'll be tough." He was in no way resentful. All he felt was fear of Hurd's fist. "What you said about the reward money goes?" Despite Hurd's cruelty, Mouse trusted the policeman. Hurd was honest, his word was good.

"It goes," snapped Hurd. "Give me a case and I'll go to bat for you. Now beat it." His tone was kinder but still implacable. Mouse left him sitting in the dark booth.

TURNING off Glassford into Engel, Mouse noticed another black sedan filled with men, the third he'd seen since leaving Hurd. He cowered against a wall as the car moved along, part of the city-wide manhunt for the Covington killers.

Scuttling along the street, he felt a sudden rush of despair. How could he prove anything? Proof was outside the duty of a stoolie, yet this time Hurd was demanding proof, evidence, the cash itself and positive identification of the three bandits. Usually, all the cops wanted was a tip-off, something to follow, to build on.

But this Covington thing had them crazy. Somebody would be the goat, for in their frenzy the cops were demanding more than any stoolie could deliver unless he wanted to die. Well, he didn't want to die and he wasn't going to, reward or no reward. He'd stall Hurd and take a beating, but he wasn't fool enough to try to play detective.

As he came into the Greek's he was disconcerted at seeing Fenn in conversation with Hazel. Fenn motioned. He went to the rear of the long counter. Fenn, he saw at once, had been drinking. Mouse tried to catch Hazel's eye, but she looked away.

"Com'ere, heel," Fenn said and gripped his arm painfully. He led him into the

kitchen. The Greek, bending over the stove, was engulfed in a cloud of smoke and steam. He did not notice them. "Lissen," Fenn growled drunkenly, "beat it for Quinn's. Tell him I ain't goin'. Tell him an' Machetti I'll see 'em in a week—where they said. They'll know."

Mouse opened his mouth, but Fenn shoved him roughly toward the back door, striking him in the back. "Beat it now. There ain't much time. Tell 'em I'm layin' up in a safe place. G'wan. Don't argue." He pushed Mouse a second time.

But Mouse stopped. "You going with Hazel?" he asked in a subdued tone.

Fenn's lips lifted. "Why not, if it's anything to you," he said shortly. "I got dough. Dames like her like dough."

Mouse turned and stumbled out the door into the darkness of the littered yard. He opened the rickety gate and stepped into the alley. Then he broke into a lope. A hundred feet up the alley the Checker Cab was parked close against the fence. Mouse circled it and found the hole in the fence. He hurried into the basement of the Engel Street rooming-house.

Tiptoeing cautiously to the dumb-waiter shaft, he put his head inside and lit a match. In the flare of the tiny flame he saw that the platform was still at the second-floor level. He blew out the match and began pulling gently on the new rope. Without sound the platform, about two feet wide by three long, descended and came to rest against the stops. On it was the tray containing the remains of Quinn's dinner. He set the tray upon the floor.

Mouse was not afraid now. His desperation, born of mingled hatred and jealousy, had submerged fear. Here was his one chance to get Fenn and at the same time money enough to impress Hazel Nydegger. To do this he had to get the definite evidence that Hurd demanded. He squatted on the platform, drawing his meager body into a knot, with his feet planted against the inner frame for leverage. He began pulling on the lifting rope. The platform moved slowly upward, carrying him with it.

IT WAS only ten or twelve feet to the level of Quinn's room, but to Mouse every inch was agony. His scant hundred and four pounds seemed a dead weight to the pull of his stringy muscles. The pulley wheels creaked faintly and Mouse heard the creaks as shrieks that must arouse the house.

At last, when he saw the hairline of light that came between the panels which separated the shaft from the room, he wrapped the ropes about his wrist and sat on his hand. He relaxed, horribly weak. Quinn's voice, coming from the room, aroused him.

"The cab ain't hot? We don't take chances like that."

"It's my cab," Machetti answered. "Don't worry. The bill of sale's made out to me. And the Rambler's ditched where nobody'll find it. But I don't like this stallin', now we got the car. You haven't been outside. You don't know how much heat is on."

Mouse heard the scratch of a match and Quinn said, "It won't get tough for a couple of hours yet. How can it—they not knowin' what they're lookin' for. Even the papers admit it."

"We don't know what they know," came Machetti's tight, shrill voice, marked with a faint condescension. "And why wait for Fenn? He's got his dough."

"Fenn gets liquored easy," Quinn argued. "He's skirt-crazy. He's liable to talk. I know him. At Charley's we can watch him."

"I don't like wet-nursin' guys," said Machetti shortly. "Where is this Charley's place from Aurora?"

"Three miles north, on 21. Say—what I can't get—did you ever see th' papers beef so much over a bank messenger?"

"He's a family man," Machetti replied restlessly. "Where is this Fenn? He's had time to make ten calls to Aurora."

Quinn's voice rose defensively, but Mouse wasn't listening. Slowly he allowed the rope to slip through his gripping fingers, using both hands so that it wouldn't burn his palms. He inched downward.

The words above him became fainter as Quinn's heavy tones merged with shriller voice of Machetti.

Mouse's feeling of triumph mounted nearly to hysteria. He had exactly what he wanted. He knew definitely who the Covington killers were and where they planned to hide. That meant, without doubt, that Hurd could get him the reward.

All that remained for the squads was the capture of Quinn, Machetti and Fenn. The loot was on them, and one of them owned the gun that had killed the bank messenger. Moreover, time was on Mouse's side. Quinn and Machetti would be waiting for Fenn to appear.

The platform came to rest gently and Mouse crawled out. Flexing his cramped arms and legs, he hurried into the yard. As he approached the fence, an idea struck him. He hastened to the cab, knelt and unscrewed the tire-valve cap from the left front tire. With it he twisted the valve stem from its seat. Air hissed out and the car settled. Mouse ran for the distant mouth of the alley.

ON GLASSFORD he walked leisurely to the next corner east of Engel and entered a drugstore. From a telephone booth he called Sergeant Hurd's number. To his dismay a woman answered and told him Hurd was out but would be back within a few minutes.

"Shall he call you?" she asked courteously.

"No," Mouse said weakly. "I'll call him. Have him wait."

"Your name—" But Mouse hung up.

Sitting tense inside the booth, he felt warm and cold by turns. As the minutes passed reaction from the terrific pressure he was under made his muscles limp. His head sagged. Six minutes went by before he roused himself and noted the time.

Hurd now answered. Mouse spilled frantic words into his ear. At last Hurd interrupted.

"Quinn and Machetti. You're positive?"

"I tell you I heard everything."

"Go over that again," ordered Hurd calmly. "The place in Aurora—"

"Charley's! C-h-a-r-l-e-y-s. On route 21. I don't know what it is. Maybe an auto-court, maybe a road-house—"

"But right now they're at that place on Engel."

"Yes. Second floor, rear. And—the reward—"

"If we knock 'em off you get it," Hurd assured him quickly. "Don't worry. Wait at the restaurant. If Fenn leaves, tail him."

"I can't do that!"

"All right." Hurd was kind. "Wait there anyhow. This is a good piece of work, Eggleston. I won't let you down."

Mouse fumbled the receiver onto its hook and came out of the booth. On the street he stood a moment leaning against a corner of the show window, recovering his breath, trying to quiet his nerves. Then he hurried toward the restaurant.

He had spilled everything he knew. He had put the finger on three men who would kill him instantly if they got a suspicion of what he was. If the cops slipped up, failed to capture Quinn and Machetti and Fenn . . .

From outside the Greek's he saw that Hazel was alone at the counter. There were a few people at the tables, but Fenn was not in sight. He came in and walked quickly to the rear. In all, he hadn't been gone more than twenty minutes.

"Where's Fenn?" he asked as he slid on to a stool.

Hazel turned and stared. She was placing food on a tray as the Greek pushed it at her through the service slot. "He went out," she said evasively.

Mouse pulled a napkin from a container and wiped his lips. Hazel, balancing the tray, veered around the end of the counter and approached a table. Mouse chewed his lips, wiping and re-wiping them on the wadded napkin.

It was now a quarter after ten. Hazel was through at half-past. Fenn would be back any minute, to wait for her, to take her out. He would be drunk.

MOUSE beckoned to Hazel as she came back behind the counter. She advanced slowly, curiously hesitant. Her red-nailed hands squeezed into her narrow hips. He leaned over the counter and she bent toward him, listening.

"Don't go out with Fenn," he whispered pleadingly.

"Why not?" She brought herself erect. "What's it to you?"

"Go with me," he urged. "Go with me and we'll be married."

Her sharp intake of breath was audible. She glared at him in sudden anger. "You dirty little—" she began, then her tongue licked at her lips. "Married?" Her mouth remained open as she watched him.

"Yes." His words came in a rush, not the words he had thought vaguely of using, but any words, for here was something that had to be said at once. "I'm getting dough, honey. I'm getting plenty of dough. We'll go into the country. We can buy a nice place, nicer than I ever figured on. We'll be married tonight. I'll rent a car and we'll drive up to Crystal Lake. There's a J. P. there who marries people any time. Any time!"

"Married." She repeated the word slowly, her eyes suspicious. "You'd marry me?" Her unbelief grew and became hostile.

"Tonight. We ought to hurry." He studied her, trying to probe her. Suddenly he saw that he had at last said the right thing. Why hadn't he thought of it before? Marriage! Dames believed you when you said marriage. It meant something. It showed you were on the level. She was smiling at him. She was smiling and the hard suspicion had gone out of her eyes.

She said slowly, "You're a good guy Mouse. I never knew."

"You'll come?"

"Sure I will." Swiftly her hand came out and patted his arm. To Mouse, she looked fresh and clean and firm. "We'll duck before Fenn shows up."

Mouse got quickly from the stool and took a few steps toward the front door.

Two big sedans were passing along Engel, moving steadily up the lane between the parked cars.

It was impossible to watch or to stand still. He came back and went toward the kitchen. Hazel grinned at him from behind the counter. He grinned back. She jerked her head toward two people eating at one of the corner tables. "Soon as I clean them up, I'm ready."

"Fine," whispered Mouse and went into the kitchen.

The Greek was frying steaks in a big skillet. His cook's cap was tilted on the back of his partly bald head and his dark round face was glistening with sweat.

"Listen," Mouse said and there was an unwonted quality of authority in his voice that made the Greek's perennial grin deepen. "Soon as Hazel cleans up these orders, she's going. A half hour early."

The black eyebrows jumped. "You step hout, yes? Sure. That's a girl hokay. Hazel."

"I'm marryin' her—" Mouse began proudly when three rapid shots clattered in the alley. The Greek set the skillet down hastily. Mouse stood rooted. The Greek picked up the skillet.

The Greek said "Whazzat Mousie? That's a gun, uh?" His thick lips hung open.

At the sound of running feet Mouse turned and started for the swinging doors. Back of him the outer door slammed open. He whirled, confused. Two men flung themselves into the kitchen. They were Quinn and Machetti. Each held a gun. Machetti's leveled instantly at Mouse.

"Hold it, you."

QUINN leaped fiercely, seized the skillet from the Greek's hand and flung it clattering upon the stove. He pushed the Greek away. Then he circled around Mouse toward the swinging doors. His mottled face was livid and he appeared not to see Mouse.

But Machetti edged slowly toward him. Mouse stood paralyzed. "Wait," Ma-

chetti said and his black eyes were blazing. "This is him, ain't it?"

Quinn yelled vaguely, "Yes, but come on. We got no time for him now. We can make it out the front."

"You dirty, sneaking rat," Machetti whispered to Mouse. "You come up the dumb-waiter, left Quinn's tray in the basement."

"I didn't!" The denial was entirely automatic.

"Come on!" Quinn cried from the swinging doors as he pushed them slowly inward "Later! A shot now an'—"

But Machetti still stared at Mouse. "You come out of the drugstore. Fenn saw you. Now you got us surrounded with flatties." His gun lifted and steadied.

Mouse came alive, screaming. He turned and flew toward Quinn and the doors. Machetti fired twice. Mouse stumbled and fell. On hands and knees he skittered toward a corner. Running toward him savagely, Machetti fired once more. Mouse flattened, lay still. Machetti pushed Quinn on through the doors and screams sounded in the restaurant.

Mouse twisted over. Blood was showing at his lips. The Greek edged from behind the stove.

"Paper," cried Mouse. "A piece of paper!"

The Greek stared at him, blind with fear, with an odd look of sagacity on his round face. Mouse again uttered the one word "paper!" but the Greek could not move. Moaning, Mouse, on his stomach, began to write on a patch of white linoleum with his gold-tipped fountain pen. He wrote steadily for perhaps thirty seconds before the pen fell out of his hand and his head dropped.

Hazel burst into the kitchen just as the rear door again banged open, just as Sergeant Hurd and two other detectives leaped into the room from outside. Now gunfire came from in front. Hurd and his companions sprinted through the swinging doors.

Hazel stood over Mouse, a towel in her hand. Her thin body swayed stiffly. She

called, "Mouse. Mouse." The sight of her seemed to galvanize the Greek. He put a huge hand under her elbow. But she wrenched away, went to her knees and rolled Mouse over on his back. Peering down at him she moaned, "They shot him, didn't they? My God, they shot him."

"Is dead," said the Greek huskily. "Is dead." He took her by the arm. "That's a girl," he whispered, "That's a girl."

Mouse lay with open eyes staring boldly at the ceiling.

IN THE captain's office, Hurd stood at the end of the desk. Hazel Nydegger, in dark clothing, a black veil dropped from the narrow brim of a cheap, ridiculous hat, sat watching, her thin red lips parted.

"It's his all right," Hurd said. "The Greek saw him write it, if we need a witness."

"I think they call it a holograph." The captain nodded.

Hurd read slowly from the square of linoleum in his hand: "I hereby will and bequeath to Hazel Nydegger, my promised wife, any reward money coming to me from the Covington case. Henry L. Eggleston." He laid the linoleum on the captain's desk.

"His name was Henry L.?" asked the captain courteously.

"Yes," Hazel said. "I always called him Mouse though."

"You'll get the money."

"Will I?" she seemed indifferent.

"Two thousand dollars," the captain told her. "We'll turn this over to the state's attorney, but don't worry. A holograph will is always good. The bank won't renege. We got most of the money they stole; Machetti's dead; the other two will burn."

"You want anything else from me?" she asked.

"Not till the trial," he replied.

She got up and Sergeant Hurd took her arm and guided her toward the door. In a tone of mingled embarrassment and clumsy kindness, he said, "A well-edu-

cated fellow, Mouse was, and a real man to think that fast in the spot he was in." He pulled the door open for her. She started through, but on the threshold she turned and spoke to both of them.

They listened, too.

"He was a great guy," she said firmly. "Don't ever forget it. He was the smartest fella I ever knew. And he was practically my husband. It was all set between us. You can tell the newspapers if you want.

We was elopin' to Crystal Lake, Mouse an' me."

"All right," Hurd said.

"I want to send the papers back home," she added defiantly. "So the folks will know what kind of people I run with here in Chi. I mean Mouse."

"All right," Hurd said.

The door closed gently behind her. The sergeant looked at the captain, but neither smiled.

The Feverish Athlete

WHEN you run around the block, you're probably working up a temperature; and if you go in for really violent exercise—like football, for instance—your body heat may go as high as 104 degrees.

So says Dr. Eugene F. DuBois of the Russell Sage Institute of Pathology, New York. Dr. DuBois has found that there is practically no difference between what he calls "athlete's fever" and the fever of actual sickness.

With this interesting exception: the elevated temperature which comes with exercise is internal—the skin remains cool. In the ordinary clinical fever, of course, the skin itself becomes warmer than normal.

"Athlete's fever" can happen to anybody. Dr. DuBois points out that instead of remaining constant at 98.6, as is commonly supposed, the human temperature actually varies widely under differing conditions—time of day, age, temperature of the air, and so on. And even moderate physical exercise can be a contributing factor toward unusually high body temperature.

—Dr. Charles Ticknor Tolson

THE AWAKENING OF MR. A.



MR. A.: Whew! I hate the very thought of having to take a cathartic.

MR. B.: You wouldn't if you'd only try Ex-Lax. It tastes swell—just like chocolate.



MR. A.: Why, that's what we give to the youngsters. What I need is dynamite!

MR. B.: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax is plenty effective, but it won't upset you.

LATER



MR. A.: Boy, I feel like a million this morning! That Ex-Lax sure is great stuff!

MR. B.: You said it, pal! We've been using Ex-Lax in our family for 30 years!

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



MEN OF DARING by STOOKIE ALLEN



**LEWIS
COTLOW**

LEWIS N. COTLOW, NEW YORK
BROKER, WON THE ANNUAL ADVENTURE
CLUB MEDAL FOR THE MOST EXCITING
REAL-LIFE THRILLER TO HAPPEN TO
ONE OF ITS MEMBERS — SIMPLY BY TAKING
A PICTURE!

COTLOW, EXPLORER WHEN HE ISN'T INSUR-
ANCE BROKING, SPENT THE SUMMER IN A
ONE MAN SAFARI — ARMED ONLY WITH A PENKNIFE
AND A MOVIE CAMERA — THAT TOOK HIM THE LENGTH
OF AFRICA. HE PHOTOGRAPHED PYGMIES AND GIANT
WATUSI SAVAGES — AND STALKING LIONS FROM A
DISTANCE OF 5 FEET; BUT HIS REAL GOAL WAS
GORILLAS!



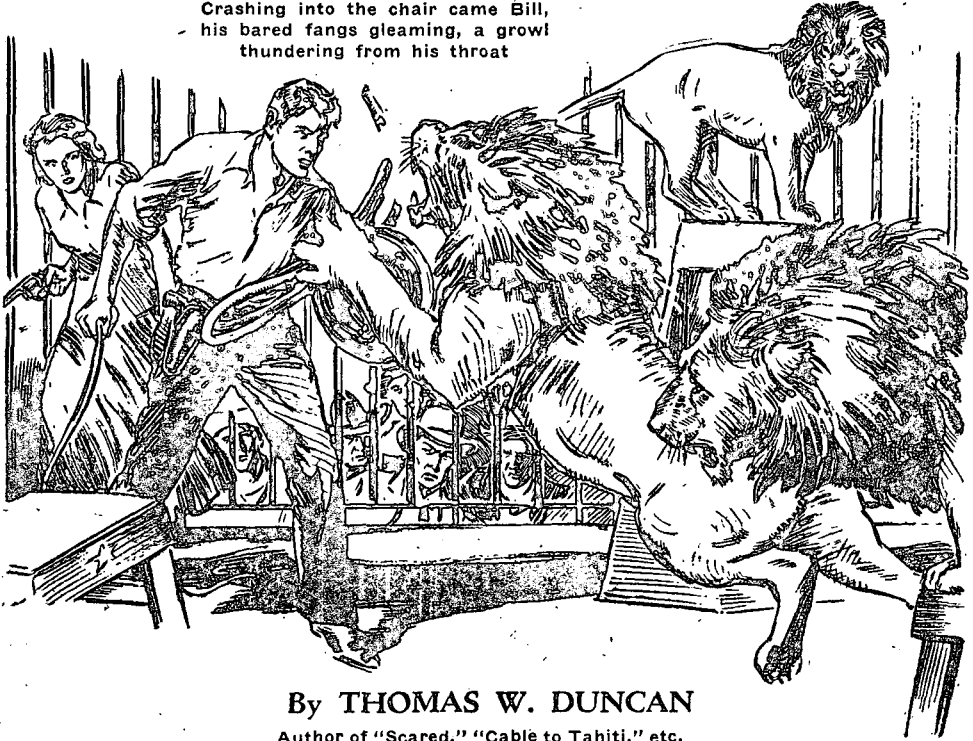
WITH KASCIULA,
THE FAMOUS PYGMY
CHIEFTAIN, COTLOW
SIGHTED A FAMILY
OF 4 GORILLAS AND
APPROACHED TO
WITHIN 20 FEET.
AS THE HUGE MALE
ROSE, BEAT HIS
BREAST AND
SHRIEKED, COTLOW
GOT HIS PICTURE.

THE GORILLA CHARGED, THE
PYGMY WARRIORS FLED BUT
THE OLD CHIEF STOOD FIRM,
SPEAR READY. THE BEAST
STOPPED, ABOUTFACED, THEN
LUMBERED OFF. THAT PIX
WON THE AWARD.
COTLOW RETURNED VIA SPAIN
WHERE POLICE TOOK HIM FOR A
SPY. HE HAD A WORSE TIME IN SPAIN
THAN HE DID WITH THE GORILLA.



A True Story in Pictures Every Week

Crashing into the chair came Bill,
his bared fangs gleaming, a growl
thundering from his throat



By THOMAS W. DUNCAN

Author of "Scared," "Cable to Tahiti," etc.

Thirteen Cats

Homicidal maniac? My dear fellow, nothing could be farther from the truth. Killing is merely a necessity—sometimes for self-preservation, sometimes out of sheer boredom. So if you will just spend half an hour with these lions . . .

Complete Novolet

I

ALWAYS in these days I go round pinching myself. I have everything I want. A beautiful wife. I own a small circus. I'm making money. The audience applauds when I leave the arena after putting my lions and tigers through their act.

The future looks wonderful. I'm twenty-six, all my best years ahead.

A year ago I was broke. Then I went to jail. Then Cecelia and I were nearly murdered. Like her father.

My troubles began piling up when

John Glaspell's truck circus fell on its nose in Capponville, Michigan. That was late June, and not since May had I smelled any wages. My job was cageboy; I cleaned cages, fed the cats, made myself useful to Larry Brian.

A wonderful fellow, Larry; one of the best wild animal trainers in the profession. He was like a father to me, and it's a dark shame that he was murdered.

Whenever that wiry little Irishman entered the steel arena I was right there watching. For I was gnawed by a sharp ambition to train cats. I used to dream of my name twenty-eight sheeted in red letters: *Alexander Longwell, famous wild*

animal trainer, with a lithograph of jungle cats pyramided and a photo of myself in breeches and boots.

I had been a roustabout the year before, but the menagerie fascinated me, and Larry Brian persuaded Glaspell to hire me as cageboy. And it was Larry who told me all he knew about cats, and who gave me my opportunity to enter the arena.

I embarked on my career one Sunday afternoon when there was no performance.

"We'll start you off with lions alone," Larry said.

Lions alone—good sense, certainly. They are less dangerous than tigers, and infinitely less dangerous than lions and tigers mixed, for those species are murderous enemies.

A whip, a kitchen chair, a pair of .38 revolvers loaded with blanks—those were my weapons. Outside the arena several menagerie men waited with feeding forks; and Larry stood in the safety-cage.

"All right," I called, and Jeb Otis, an old cageman, sent in the lions.

Seven of them poured out of the chute, fine, spirited beasts. I cracked my whip, cueing them as Larry had taught me. Nancy leaped trimly to her pedestal. Then Sal, and Beauty, and Jack. Only Joe, Bill and King still prowled on the arena floor.

Then something happened.

LATER, Jeb Otis yapped that he had misunderstood instructions. Perhaps. That old cageman had a sour soul, and possibly he was jealous to see a young punk getting a start as a trainer. At any rate, he opened the tiger chute and into the arena blazed those striped killers.

Zaza, a Royal Bengal, snarled in first.

King, a lion, was the arena boss, and when he saw Zaza he sprang for his throat. Bill joined him. Instantly the arena writhed with battling cats.

Into the melee I sent my whip, but I might as well have been blowing them kisses. I was glad to hear the safety-cage door clang open, bringing Larry's experience to the brawl.

Larry yelled, "Watch out for Jack!"

I'd blundered desperately.

Trying to break up the fight, I'd neglected the pedestaled cats. Jack had been perched high, yawning at the scrap, but as I came within range, he dived at me.

I wheeled, swung my chair. If a cat springs up at you, the chair-legs poke his chest, confuse him, break his thrust. But Jack was snarling in a powerful downslant. His paw knocked me across the arena.

Just before my head banged the bars I saw Larry shoot a charge of wadding and hot powder into his throat.

When the blackness rolled away, grass grew beneath my head and the big top soared above me. Larry was giving Jeb Otis a tongue-lashing that would have peeled the hide off a mule. My shoulder burned with iodine.

I pushed myself up. My head ballooned as big and painlaced as a lightning-gashed cloud; the earth tipped and tilted; but I tottered to my feet.

"I'm going in again."

Larry nodded.

Was it bravado? Not a bit of it. It was as vital as a pilot's going back up immediately after a crash. I was sick and woozy, but I knew I might be conditioned against animal training forever if I didn't return to the arena at once.

Then it happened—that crazy un-sinewy thing that every animal trainer in the world dreads.

Usually it happens to a veteran trainer—suddenly, without warning. We call it arena shell-shock. It isn't physical fear; it's nervous horror. Your nerves have had enough, that's all. You want to go into the arena—it's your career, your life—but your nerves scream, "No!" Your knees give way in the safety-cage, your hands flutter, you sob like a kid.

You hate yourself. You're through, and you know it.

Well, I wasn't through, after all; but it took Conrad Jones to lick my arena shell-shock. Conrad Jones was more dangerous than all thirteen cats put together.

II

THE shell-shock hit me Sunday, and the following Wednesday Glaspell's Circus folded. Thursday afternoon our canvas still floated above the lot in Capponville.

I was broke and I owed money to Larry Brian. Being a headliner, he had received at least part of his salary, and he'd been slipping me an occasional sawbuck.

Larry and I were sitting in his dressing tent, and I kept glancing at a photo on his trunk, the portrait of a dark-haired, olive-skinned girl, very beautiful in the Hedy Lamarr manner. Larry's daughter, Cecelia.

She lived in a California town down the coast from San Francisco. Larry didn't want her trouping around the country, but she had spent a few days with us early in the season.

Till I met her, my life had been aimless. I had thought that some day I might like to be an animal trainer, yes, but there was no hurry. Then we fell in love, and now I yearned for fame as a trainer, because fame meant money and marriage.

Well, my arena-shock had tarnished that dream.

"What'll happen to the cats?" I asked Larry.

"Glaspell's creditors will probably get them."

"I'd like to follow them. Live with them. And every day try screwing up my nerve."

"Take it easy, son. You've had what amounts to a nervous breakdown."

We were interrupted by a gilly busting into the tent. A gilly is anybody not connected with the show; and this big, bald, well-fed guy wasn't. A black ribbon dangled from his nose-glasses.

"I'm looking for Larry Brian," he announced.

"I'm Brian."

"My name is Sisson—Floyd Sisson. I'm an attorney from Chicago."

He wouldn't have needed to add that—he had shyster plastered all over him.

"Listen, mister," Larry said. "We're all

busted flatter than pancakes. So if you're trying to collect—"

Sisson raised a beefy hand.

"I'm no collector. I represent a client who wants to hire you. A very wealthy client indeed."

"A showman?"

Sisson shook his head.

Larry sighed. "Then you must have the wrong Brian. All I know is handling cats."

"This job is handling cats. The same ones you've been working. I've just bought them for my client."

"And he isn't a showman? What's his name?"

JONES. He's a very uncommon man, Mr. Brian. Uncommonly wealthy. He decides he wants lions and tigers for his private zoo. So—like that—he wires me to purchase them. He asks me to secure the services of their trainer. And here I am."

"What do I do? If he isn't a showman, what's the job?"

"I presume you're to present the beasts in their act, as you've been doing. To amuse Mr. Jones' friends."

"What salary?"

"He'll go to two hundred a week."

Larry's feet had been cocked on the trunk, and now, slowly, they descended to earth.

"How many weeks?"

"He didn't say. But I suppose till he wearies of this new interest. Mr. Jones has all the money anybody could possibly want, and he can afford to coddle his slightest whim."

Sisson extracted a stuffed wallet, licked his thumb, and counted ten twenty-buck bills.

"I'll be glad to explain everything," he said, "when we can talk privately."

And he favored me with a cold stare.

"Alex is okay. My cageboy. Maybe you'll hire him, too."

Sisson froze up.

"I am merely Mr. Jones' attorney. His agent. He is a precise man. He expects his

instructions to be followed exactly. He wired me to buy the animals and to hire their trainer. He didn't mention a cageboy. If I should exceed his instructions he would be furious.

"He also cautioned me to carry on my business with as much secrecy as possible. If you accept the job, I shall have to ask you to tell nobody where you are to travel with the animals."

His dictatorial tone was riling up Larry's Irish, so I snapped to my feet and left the tent before Larry made a point of his hiring me.

I DIDN'T go far. Ducking beneath the ropes anchoring that small tent, I hurried around behind and lay on the grass.

"Where do I go?" Larry was asking.

"To the Double F ranch in Wyoming."

"Good gosh! Is Jones a cowboy?"

"Conrad Jones is a gentleman—a young gentleman. The ranch is one of his whims. I have never been a guest there, but I'm told it is magnificent."

"When do I start?"

"As soon as possible. I've bought the truck cages, and we'll load them onto railroad flat cars. You'll ride the caboose. Make your own arrangements about stopovers for feed and water."

"I should have a cageboy," Larry said.

"We've settled that. You're working for Mr. Jones now. His interests must be yours—wholly. You may find him trying at times, but if you follow his orders exactly, there is no reason why you should come to grief."

I wondered how long Larry would last with the job. I couldn't imagine him knuckling under in blind obedience to anybody.

He asked, "What part of Wyoming?"

"Purple Gulch. An inland town, thirty miles north of the railroad at Fortune."

Larry asked dubiously: "This is on the square, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I've never been tangled up in anything crooked."

"Crooked? Mr. Jones is wealthy; he doesn't need to be crooked. It's as I told you. He wants a zoo for his ranch, he can afford it, and that's the whole story."

"How did he know our cats were for sale?"

"Several weeks ago he asked me to look for animals to stock his zoo. At that time, the zoo buildings were under construction. When I read in the paper yesterday that this circus was stranded, I wired Mr. Jones, and he wired back for me to buy the animals and hire their trainer."

"Okay," Larry said. "I'll leave for Wyoming tonight."

Larry Brian grinned when I confessed eavesdropping. "Well—since you know where I'm going, why don't you meet me in Purple Gulch?"

So we schemed that I should wander out to the Double F ranch and ask for the job of cageboy.

"We'll make Jones think it's his own idea, hiring you," Larry planned. "He must be a queer one, and if you'd arrive with me he'd likely think I'd gone beyond my authority. So we'll be strangers."

When we shook hands goodbye, Larry rustled a twenty into my palm. "Pin money, son. See you in Wyoming."

But I never saw him again, alive.

III

I CAUGHT a westbound freight, and next day west from Chicago I rode the blinds of the Omaha Express. That was an error. For when they changed engines in Wiggam Junction, a railroad dick slugged me behind the ear. I woke up in jail.

Nice fellows, those authorities in Wiggam Junction. They wanted my twenty-buck bill. The judge fined me fifty dollars for vagrancy, and I served a day in jail for each dollar I couldn't pay.

So for a month I ate bean soup and black coffee, wondering why I'd ever kicked about the cook-house grub on Glaspell's show. They set me loose in August, and I streaked from town faster than a card grifter's fingers.

Purple Gulch dotted the map far west of Cheyenne—and west of nearly everything else, including civilization. Early one bright, hot morning I rolled into the town of Fortune—railhead on a spur line—and limped north along thirty miles of hub-deep ruts towards Purple Gulch.

Those last thirty miles were harder than all the rest of the trip from Wiggam Junction. Ten of them I walked, not because cars snooted my jerking thumb, but because no cars bounced along that wretched trail.

High, clear air stretched to eternity above that land, and loneliness rolled away by the hundreds of miles. Remote on the southwest horizon a range of snow-caps sparkled; but ahead of me stretched empty land, empty sky.

Footsore, dirty, thin, hungry, unshaven—the road had collected its toll. I wondered about Larry. When they took my twenty in Wiggam Junction, they cleaned me to the last cent, and the jailer refused me a stamp. So I hadn't written Larry. Nor Cecelia. For a month I had been lost down a rat-hole.

I thought that Jones must be eccentric indeed to exile himself out here, far from the brilliant cities of earth. A screwball. Imagine dragging tigers and lions into this prairie-dog country.

I sat on a rock, eased off my shoes, cooled my blisters. And I thought of Cecelia in a bright-California town, and on that weary morning my love for her seemed a hopeless thing.

A sound interrupted my meditations: miles away, from the south, drifted the noise of a car. I snatched on my shoes and jumped up. At last, over the swelling terrain, it flashed into view, a yellow roadster.

"Lift?" called the chap at the wheel.

He was different from anybody you might expect to encounter on that desolate road. He had togged out his lanky bones in golf clothes, new and speckless. He was about thirty, with skin as blond as cream.

Blond hair topped a head too narrow for its length; a knife-thin nose protruded

from his oval face; and steel-rimmed spectacles flashed before chilly blue eyes. Long pointed nails tipped his slender fingers. He reminded me of a wax figure stiff in a store window—the same bloodless skin.

But he shared one human quality with everyone else who gave me lifts: curiosity. My name? Destination? Occupation?

"I'M IN the show business," I said. "Animal man. My name is Alexander Longwell. I've bummed my way out here to get a job."

His blond brows lifted.

"There's a ranch out here," I continued, "that has bought thirteen cats. I'm heading there for work. Do you know anything about it?"

"I should," he said in a voice as colorless as cold glycerine. "I own it. My name is Conrad Jones. How did you hear about my ranch?"

I thought fast.

"Word gets around in the show business. I ran across a fellow who was on the Glaspell show when it folded, and he knew a trainer named Brian—"

"Did you ever know Brian?"

"Never had the pleasure."

I hated Jones's mouth. He had a mannerism of curling one side of his upper lip toward his arched nostrils.

"Odd you never knew him," he said. "He seemed well acquainted with you."

I gulped.

"After he arrived with the cats, he told me he needed a cageboy. So I said hire one, of course. And he told me about a young man named Alexander Longwell, whom he was expecting in Purple Gulch. You're late, Mr. Longwell. Why?"

"I've been in jail."

So abruptly that I nearly crashed headlong through the windshield, Jones slammed the car to a halt. His right hand darted from the wheel and clamped my wrist. Steely strength-crouched in those deceptively slim fingers.

"Now listen," he said. "If you work for me there's one word—" His grip tight-

ened; his lips were bloodlessly taut over his teeth; but his eyes were what scared me. "One word," he continued, "that you must never utter. Jail. Prison. Penitentiary. Do you understand?"

If he had been drunk—but he wasn't.

He flung down my wrist and sat gripping the wheel, his eyes fixed on the road ahead; and he seemed to go a long distance away, farther even than those mountains.

Then he gave that narrow head a rapid shake; he glanced at me, took a deep breath, smiled.

"Very sorry. Forgive me. I suffer from claustrophobia."

"Did a dog bite you?"

He laughed. "Not hydrophobia. Claustrophobia is an unnatural dread of confinement."

We drove on in silence. Finally, he said: "We waited for you—didn't hire a cage-boy. So the animals have been without expert care."

"Larry Brian's care is expert enough for any cat."

"But Mr. Brian is no longer with the cats."

"He—?"

"Oh no. He left after a week."

"But—where did he go?"

"To California. He has a daughter there, I believe."

Suddenly I didn't want to travel another foot with Conrad Jones. I didn't want to go to his ranch and play chambermaid to those cats. I was sick of this country and sick of Jones and of everything, but the vision of a neat bungalow under the palms of California, where Larry and his daughter would welcome me.

The road lifted us to a ridge.

"Purple Gulch," announced Jones, jabbing a long forefinger toward the valley below us.

I'D HAVE named it Last Hope. On either side of a single street, a dozen wooden buildings straggled, half of them vacant, all of them sun-blistered and ready to fall apart. It was like the bleached bones of a town.

Jones halted outside a pool room, pressed the horn, and a man he introduced as Shorty Ferguson emerged. Wind and sun-squinting had scratched spoke-wheel wrinkles around his grey eyes, and his skin was brown as saddle leather. He wore guns.

"My new cageboy," Jones told him.

"Wait a minute, I'm not sure I want the job."

"As to salary," Jones said, as if I'd never spoken, "how about fifty a week?"

A swell opening—an out.

"I'd have to have a hundred and fifty."

"All right. A hundred and fifty."

Sisson had been right: money meant nothing to Conrad Jones.

"Get in," he told Shorty; and that man snapped open the roadster door and crowded me into the middle of the seat.

I said, "I don't want that job. I'll get out here."

"Take it easy, partner; those cats are lonesome for you," Shorty Ferguson said.

The roadster kicked up the dust of Main Street, and dashed north from town.

The village of Purple Gulch, I began to realize, had been a mere fly-speck on the vastness of the living map we were traversing.

"When do we get to the ranch?" I asked.

Shorty said, "We've been on the ranch ever since we left the Gulch."

"How far do we go?"

"Sixteen miles."

Finally, on a backbone of land, Jones stopped the car and pointed.

"The ranch, Mr. Longwell."

Through shining space I discerned a distant collection of toy buildings in a valley, set among cottonwood trees.

"An oasis," he murmured. "Our artesian well gives the sweetest water in Wyoming. Aren't you happy you're going to work there?"

"No."

A smile parted his thin, raw-looking lips, and his glance slid over me from the ends of his eyes. Perhaps I owed it to my lack of breakfast, to my nerves still raw from arena-shock—but suddenly I tasted terror, there in the naked sunlight.

Up from between those two men my body squirmed, and I was shouting:

"Let me out. I'm going back."

A quick-handed man, Shorty Ferguson. His heavy fingers dug my collar-bones, and without the least evidence of effort he plopped me back down into the seat.

"Don't be a damn fool, partner."

Jones chuckled. "I'm wondering, Shorty, if it wouldn't be an excellent idea to give Mr. Longwell a taste of your markmanship?"

"Nothing to shoot at. Drive on till we see a jack."

Jones sent the car along the road looping into the valley.

"I've seen marksmanship as good as Shorty's," he said pleasantly, "and I've known a few men who could draw almost as fast. But I've never seen the two skills so happily—shall we say married?"

And after a silence he added, "It's power, to shoot that way. And it's power also to hire such a man. A beautiful thing, power."

REACHING the valley floor, he swung the car toward the ranch, and coming toward us I saw one of the oldest jaloppies that had ever sprinkled the highway with bolts.

Instantly, Jones' body tensed; he stepped hard on the gas and zipped toward that ancient car as if he meant to knock it off the trail.

What on earth—?

A California license vibrated beneath the jalopy's snout, and as we skimmed toward it the contraption shuddered to a halt and the driver leaped out. The driver was a girl, a dark-haired girl. Cecelia Brian.

She ran.

Our roadster slowed to a stop and Jones and Shorty jumped out and chased her, and I followed, too. Jones' long shanks gulped up the distance between them; he grabbed her wrist, jerking her violently round. Her free hand slapped him hard. He seized her other wrist.

Fury blinded me.

I kicked him in the pants. He yelled. I flung my body between him and Cecelia, breaking his wrist-holds, and I doubled my right fist and smashed it into his mouth. And my left knuckles thumped into his solar plexus, and down the man went.

He had dared to touch Cecelia. I wanted to kill him. I jumped astride his bones and my hands clamped his throat and all my strength surged down my forearms into my fingers. And I was screeching, "Never touch her again—do you hear? Never touch her—"

Then I found it hard to breathe myself. Fingers were clamping my neck. Odd. How long had they been there? Fingers were pinching shut my windpipe, and my body was being rocked violently back and forth, faster and faster.

Then—an upsurge of blackness. A cannonball hit the sun; there was an explosion of light; and darkness—as utter as at the end of space. Voices. My neck hurt. The odor of violets.

Once an eternity ago I had known a girl . . . girl named Cecelia . . . and always a faint odor of violets emanated from her dark beauty. Cool fingers on my forehead, fingers tangled in my hair. I said, "Cecelia . . ."

"Oh, Alex," she said, in a voice under-shot with great sorrow. "Alex . . ."

IV

I OPENED my eyes and saw her face above me. And with the weird feeling that all of this had occurred sometime before I said, "I'm going in again. Those cats . . . can't lick me," and I tottered to my feet.

But instead of a big top in Michigan, I saw above me only the Wyoming sky, and instead of Larry Brian I saw a man named Shorty and a man named Conrad Jones. His golf togs were no longer speckless, and he held a handkerchief to his bleeding lip.

"You'll regret your childish temper, Mr. Longwell."

I snapped, "I doubt it."

Jones swung his cold gaze on Shorty.

"You should have shot him."

Shorty shrugged.

"But on second thought I'm glad you didn't."

A flick of interest gleamed in Shorty's eyes; not at Jones' words, but at something loping across the landscape. It was a jackrabbit. His hands swept to his holsters.

Without a jerk, without a ruffle in his liquid-smooth execution, his guns flowed into his hands and lifted and one gun discharged just as it ascended to the apogee of the quick draw.

The jackrabbit leaped high and fell dead with a bullet-hole through his head.

They loaded Cecelia and me into the roadster beside Jones, while Shorty Ferguson occupied the rumble seat, where he could use those revolvers if occasion demanded it.

Through the windshield I observed the ranch approaching along the floor of the valley. Magnificent is a big word, but no other fits the habitation of Conrad Jones.

Cottonwood poplars rimmed a lawn where sprinklers encouraged green grass to thrive in that arid country.

The house itself was as modern as swing music, and as unadorned as geometry. Gleaming white, it stood three stories tall and a half-acre big.

Windows with stainless steel frames and frosted panes admitted light to the lower floor, but above that the house was a monolith with endless square yards of windowless expanses.

The interior was as blissful as modernity could make it. The very air was perfection—cool, mechanically conditioned. I glimpsed a Japanese house boy at work in the living room, an expansive chamber whose round unframed mirrors reflected its green carpet and low chairs.

To Shorty, Jones said: "Take them upstairs." And to me: "Shave and bathe. You're filthy. You'll find clothes."

NO STAIRCASES intruded an old-fashioned note into that home; instead, a carpeted ramp ascended. Unlock-

ing a copper door leading off the third-floor corridor, Shorty waved Cecelia and me into a large living room.

"Your bedroom and bath are beyond that door," he told Cecelia. And after she had gone he pointed to another door.

"Those are your rooms, Mr. Longwell."

"Thanks," I said. "And thanks for choking me—instead of shooting me."

"Don't thank me. Maybe you'll wish I'd shot you."

"What's going to happen to us?"

He had straight, seemingly-frank eyes. "I don't know, partner."

"Is Jones completely sane?"

"Sure. As sane as anybody in the world today."

"What happened to Larry Brian?"

"I don't know."

"Is he in this house?"

"Not that I know of."

"Jones told me," I said, "that he went home to California. But if he went out there, why is his daughter here?"

"Ask me something easy."

"Is he dead?"

"He might be."

"You work for Jones. Surely you've got some idea—"

"Why should I fib to you, partner? It's no skin off my nose. Brian was here. Then he wasn't here. I didn't kill him, and I didn't see him killed. For all I know, he might be in this house. It's a big place. Or he may be dead."

Shorty turned, paused at the door.

"One piece of advice, partner. Take everything easy. I'd rather not shoot you. Every time you shoot a man it nicks you, the way it used to notch the old-timers' gun handles. Ever think of that?"

"I've never shot anyone."

"Sometimes you dream about it," he said.

That windowless room was deathly still. After a moment he asked:

"Hungry?"

"Plenty."

"I'll have one of the Japs send up food. The dumbwaiter's in that wall."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it, partner."

He left, locking the door behind him.

WHEN I returned to the living room of my suite after bathing and dressing, I found Cecelia. She buried her face in my lapel, her shoulders agitated by sobs, then pulled away from me.

"Sorry, darling," she said, attempting a smile. "The rain's over. I've set out your breakfast. I found it on the dumbwaiter."

While I ate I told what had happened to me since the Glaspell show foundered, and when I was through she murmured:

"Jones lied when he told you Dad came home to California. He didn't. I waited there nearly three weeks before starting to Wyoming to find him. I'm afraid he's—"

"A prisoner here?"

She shook her head; her eyes filled.

"I'm afraid he's— not alive any more."

Larry Brain dead!

"He wrote me from Michigan about getting the job, and sent me money. And again on the way west he wrote: His last letter was written from this ranch, two days after he got here. He thought something was phony about the place. And he despised Jones. He called him a spoiled brat.

"He said he'd throw up the job in a minute if he didn't need the money. He wrote that Jones reminded him of a narrow-headed cat. And you know his opinion of them."

Certainly I did know. Often I had heard Larry declaim against any cat-animal with a narrow head, close-set eyes and a long nose, for those features signified the viciousness of the born killer.

"That was the last letter I had from him. I kept writing, with no replies. After more than two weeks I was terribly worried. Then I had an idea.

"I wrote to the attorney-general of Wyoming. I told him something was wrong, because it wasn't like Dad to fail writing, and if he were sick and couldn't write he surely would have asked someone at the ranch to let me know. I had this reply."

From the bosom of her dress Cecelia brought a letter.

The attorney-general expressed hope that by now she had heard from Larry, and then he tossed off this:

However, it is only fair to advise you that we have had previous complaints about the Double F ranch. The local situation in that county is not, perhaps, all it should be.

I am giving your communication my earnest attention in the hope that my office can find some way of helping you as soon as possible.

I should appreciate your treating this information as confidential, and let me assure you that when we learn anything of consequence about your father we will immediately get in touch with you.

I RETURNED the letter. "Have you heard anything more from the attorney-general?"

She shook her head. "As soon as I read that letter a queer chill came over me, an awful feeling that Dad was—dead. Then I took hold of myself and decided to come to Wyoming. Anything seemed better than waiting for a letter that never came.

"I had a little money, so I started out in my old flivver. Driving alone, I thought everything over, and made plans. I decided to slip into Purple Gulch quietly and find out all I could about Jones. I registered at the hotel as Cecelia Baker. That was six days ago.

"I asked a few casual questions and kept my ears open, and I learned a few things about Jones. He came to Purple Gulch from nowhere seven or eight years ago. He had several nice new checkbooks on banks in Chicago, Boston and New York. Whenever he wanted anything he wrote a check, and it didn't seem to make any difference to him how big the amount. And the checks were all good.

"He bought this ranch and built this house. That was the most excitement Purple Gulch had ever known. He imported a flock of workmen from the East, and it took a small fleet of trucks to haul the materials from the railroad at Fortune. The expense must have been terrific.

"This ranch is almost endless—thousands of acres. It runs clear to Purple Gulch and surrounds the town on three sides. And Jones has been buying real estate in the town, too. If he keeps on, it won't be long till the town is part of his ranch."

Cecelia paused, frowning thoughtfully.

"When Jones first came, people thought it was wonderful that eastern money was flowing into this region, but now they're not so sure. They're uneasy—they hardly know why. For he's unaccountable. They never know what he'll do next."

"Bringing jungle animals out here is his latest fad. If an ordinary person had bought thirteen cats the people would have said he was crazy. With Jones—well—you can't call all that money crazy."

"They say, too, that he's demoralized law enforcement. He and the sheriff are wonderful friends. Jones has a lot of men working for him here—men from cities—hard-looking cookies—and the sheriff has granted Jones the favor of making them all deputies."

"This fellow Shorty is Jones' first lieutenant, and he's a deputy too. That's why in this day and age he goes around wearing guns."

"So Jones commands a regiment of deputy sheriffs. People feel there's something wrong, somewhere. But till six months ago nothing ever happened that people could suspect as unlawful."

Cecelia lowered her voice—unconsciously, I think.

V

THERE was a young fellow in Purple Gulch named Ben Orr—rather bright, but not especially honest. Six months ago he took a trip to Cheyenne, and when he came back he told his wife he'd stumbled onto something that would make them rich. Somehow, it concerned Jones.

"One day he drove out here to the ranch—and he never came back. He simply vanished. His wife asked the sheriff to investigate. The sheriff went through the

motions and reported that Ben Orr never arrived at the ranch. Jones had never seen him.

"Mrs. Orr wasn't satisfied. She knew that the sheriff had grown mighty prosperous since Jones came. So she went to Cheyenne and talked to the state authorities.

"They sent several men to the ranch to investigate. Jones treated them fine. Wined them and dined them. He practically convinced them that Orr must have deserted his wife.

"But they had their reports to fill out, so they looked the ranch over rather carefully. And in a gully they found a car."

Cecelia shuddered.

"It was a black steel skeleton of a car—burned. From the engine number they learned that it had belonged to Orr. So they knew he'd actually come to the ranch—but where was he?"

"Jones swore he'd never seen him. Jones' men swore the same thing. The state authorities went over the ranch foot by foot and never found a sign of Orr. So that was that. Figure it out."

"That was in March. Nothing was ever done about it. You can't arrest a millionaire because a burned car is found on his ranch. After all, Orr might have wanted to vanish for reasons of his own. Maybe he was tired of his wife. Maybe he had another woman in Cheyenne. Maybe he burned his own car."

"If the state agents had found Orr's body—but they didn't."

"After that, Jones stayed on his ranch. He wasn't seen in Purple Gulch, and he quit his almost daily drives to Fortune. Then all at once, in May, a flock of workmen appeared from the East, and the trucks with supplies once again rumbled through Purple Gulch. Jones had launched another Private Works Administration."

I lighted a cigarette and stuck it in Cecelia's mouth.

"Thanks," she said. "I need it. Well—"

"About that time, too, or maybe a little later, this fellow Shorty Ferguson popped up from nowhere. The sheriff immediately

deputized him, and he buckled on his guns. Jones was strengthening his forces, people said.

"Why? And why all this new building? Then one morning a month ago people in Purple Gulch rubbed their eyes. For driving through town from Fortune they saw cage trucks with lions and tigers. Dad was with those trucks.

"So the news was out: Jones had built a fine animal house and a steel arena on his ranch. He was starting a zoo.

"And then Jones turned up in town again. His retirement was over. He told how he was establishing a zoo, how much he admired wild animals.

"As far as I can learn, nobody ever saw Dad again. He came to the ranch with the animals—and disappeared."

She had to clamp down on her lower lip a moment before going on.

"WELL, I hadn't been in Purple Gulch long before I knew it would be useless to ask the sheriff to help find Dad. And the attorney-general probably wrote me that letter and forgot all about it. It was up to me.

"So I kept my eyes open. And I noticed that every morning Jones and Shorty drove into town in the roadster. Shorty dropped off, and Jones drove on to Fortune. They say he goes to a barber there for a daily shave, and buys the morning paper, and so on.

"He always came back to Purple Gulch about eleven. He'd go into the pool hall and fool around till twelve-thirty or so. Then he and Shorty would start back to the ranch. I decided to come out here while they were gone.

"This morning I waited in the hotel lobby. When the roadster came to town, the routine was a little different. My flivver was parked, as usual, in front of the hotel, and Jones parked beside it. He and Shorty looked it over. I wanted to kick myself. For it's registered in my real name, and if they saw the name 'Brian' they might put two and two together.

"Well, after looking it over, Shorty went

to the pool hall, as usual, and Jones drove toward Fortune. Right away, I hurried into the flivver and drove out here.

"I was hoping for the thousand-to-one chance of finding Dad—or learning something about him. When I stopped in the ranch yard a couple of hard-looking eggs appeared and asked what I wanted.

"I put on a good act. I told them Mr. Jones had told me I might come out and see the wild animals. They looked at each other, not knowing what to do, and I said, 'Well, aren't you going to show them to me?' It's wonderful what a bold front will do. They took me to the animal house.

"There were the cats. I almost broke down when I saw them. I'd seen Dad and those cats together so often—it was as if I'd seen a hat or a coat of his.

"Where's their trainer?" I asked.

"He left," they said.

"When?"

"A few days after the cats came."

"Well," I said, "I'm going in the house now and wait for Conrad. We're old friends."

"That bothered them. You could see they were uneasy, but after all I might be an old friend, and if they tried to stop me Jones might be mad. So they let me come to the house.

"One of the Japs let me in. I told him Mr. Jones had invited me out for lunch. He was all polite bewilderment. I sat down in the living room, and sent him for a glass of water. As soon as he left, I dashed up the ramp to second floor.

"Crazy, wasn't it? But I was still hoping for that thousand-to-one chance of finding Dad. It didn't come. After I'd opened a few doors into empty bedrooms the Jap came pattering after me like a little yellow cat.

"I marched downstairs and right out to my car. I thought I still had plenty of time to get back to town—if Jones followed his usual routine. I decided to pack in a hurry and leave for Cheyenne and see the attorney-general.

"You know the rest. Jones had altered his routine. . . . So here we are, Alex. Do

you think we'll ever get out of here alive?"

"I doubt it," I said.

WELL, we were together, anyway. And maybe we'd scrape through our trouble, and even find Larry Brian alive somewhere in this house. At least I held out that hope to Cecelia.

But after she returned to her room, and I went to my bedroom, I admitted to myself that the chances of finding the little Irishman alive looked slim.

Drowsiness crept over me. I switched off the lights, and that windowless room was plunged into absolute darkness. No escape from that suite of rooms, I kept thinking, unless you could walk through the walls.

And even if Cecelia and I managed to slip from the house there still remained sixteen desolate miles to Purple Gulch, and another thirty to Fortune. And most of that territory was policed by Jones' own deputies.

Then sleep came, and for a little while I did escape in my dreams.

... Shorty Ferguson wakened me. I had slept till six-thirty. Mr. Jones, he said, expected Cecelia and me to appear for dinner in an hour and a half.

"What'll he do; poison our food?"

"That's one thing he won't do, partner."

Despite everything, I had a sneaking liking for Shorty. He was so self-composed, so detached, so modest about his excellent marksmanship. On the other hand, I didn't for a moment doubt that in a pinch he would cheerfully draw his guns and shoot me.

At the door, he said:

"One thing, partner. Hold your temper tonight. If you hould go hog-wild again and choke Mr. Jones, I'd have to kill you."

"Why don't you kill me and get it over with?"

"It's not my party."

He left, to return at one minute of eight and herd Cecelia and me down the ramps to the first floor. Smiling, Jones received us in the living room. He was faultlessly attired in a white dinner jacket; and his manners, too, were faultless.

A house boy brought a tray of Martinis; and when they had us aglow we proceeded into the dining room.

"So pleasant to have 'guests,'" Jones murmured over the thick soup.

A perpetual smile lingered on his thin mouth. All through that delectable meal his lips reminded me of a man who is on the verge of telling a brilliant joke.

Before dessert, while the cigarettes went round, he asked: "How do you like my ranch?"

"I've heard," I said, "that it's bad etiquette to run down a place where you're being entertained, so I won't tell you I think it's lousy."

"Well, well," he said gently, "perhaps you won't have to bear it too long," and across the table Cecelia's eyes were full of apprehension.

That was the coldest ice cream I'd ever eaten.

In the living room, over our liqueurs, Jones asked: "Isn't Shorty's marksmanship exceptional?"

"He ought to be with a side-show."

"Come, come," he said playfully, "don't put such ideas into his head. I'd hate to lose Shorty. He came to me only in June, but already I trust him fully. As fully, that is, as I trust anybody."

Shorty's gaze fastened on his boot-tips.

"He had the most excellent recommendations," Jones murmured. "I believe I have his letter, yet."

And from his pocket he slipped a folded paper and passed it to me.

Calling it a letter of recommendation was Jones' idea of humor. For it was a police circular.

Inked on that paper were Shorty's pictures, front and side views, and his suit was convict gray. A number dangled from his neck, also. Two and a half years before, he had escaped from Canyon City, while awaiting execution. The circular furnished a string of his aliases, and recounted that he had slain a couple of Denver detectives.

To Texas, it appeared, went the dubious

honor of giving Shorty to the world; his ability to pull his shooting irons was amazing; and a half dozen other western states would have been overjoyed to hang him, shoot him, electrocute him, or shove him into a lethal chamber.

"I suppose," Jones said, "you're wondering why I'm holding you and Miss Brian."

I took a deep breath.

"It's because Cecelia and I are the only people in the world who are interested enough in Larry Brian to raise a howl about his disappearance. We'd go to the state authorities and demand action. Is that it?"

"Exactly," Jones said.

VI

I KNEW it, then—knew that the little Irishman would never more go into an arena and put the cats through their turn. And Cecelia knew it too. Her lips were apart and her eyes a-glisten as she turned to Jones and whispered:

"You mean—he's dead?"

"Dead and in hell."

It lifted me right out of my chair. I had never hated anybody as I hated Conrad Jones.

Shorty commanded, "Sit down!"

"He'll sit down fast enough," Jones said, bringing out his automatic.

It was Cecelia who saved me, just as her father had saved me in the arena back in Michigan, on a Sunday that seemed so long ago. She glided between Jones and me and flung her arms around my neck and began to weep.

"Oh Alex . . . Alex . . . Don't leave me. Don't leave me alone . . ."

It brought a glimmer of sanity back into my brain. I stroked her hair, and presently I allowed her to persuade me into my chair.

Jones sat watching us.

"Very much in love, aren't you, Mr. Longwell?"

"None of your business."

He glanced at Shorty. "A man of spirit, isn't he, Shorty? Well, well—he'll need it."

I demanded, "Did you kill Larry?"

He settled back smugly in his chair, his lips pursed, and in humorous indecision gently scratched the side of his head with the snout of the automatic.

"You put things so—bluntly. But since you ask—yes."

"Why?"

"I'll use your own words, Mr. Longwell. None of your business."

"Did you—bury his body?"

"After a fashion, Mr. Longwell. Hardly a Christian burial—but a burial."

"Where?"

"Now, now." Coyly, he lifted a palm. "That would be telling. There's always the one chance in a million that you might escape. Not that you're going to, but you might. Suppose you did accomplish the impossible, and reached unfriendly authorities, and told them I had confessed killing Mr. Brian. So what?"

Jones shrugged.

THEY would come here, and I'd deny admitting any such thing. They might suspect me, but what could they do? Arrest me on suspicion? Why, I'd have a regiment of the smartest lawyers in the country flying into Wyoming.

"But if they found Mr. Brian's body—and Mr. Orr's—that would be different. Very different. A dead body is so very tangible, isn't it? But let me assure you—the bodies will never be found. I'm a brilliant man, Mr. Longwell.

"You're insane," I said.

"No, not insane. Neurotic, to be sure. But goodness, who isn't? And very sensibly, I recognize my neurasthenia and live with it quite peacefully. I dread crowds, confinement—so I came to the least crowded part of the country.

"Although, sometimes, I do get bored here. Dreadfully, dreadfully bored. *Ennui*, as the French say. The terrible flatness of existence. A wasteland . . ."

And after a moment he added, "But I am not bored tonight. Tonight I'm—exhilarated. We're engaged in a great adventure, aren't we? All of us. . . ."

"It may be an adventure to you but it's a pain in the neck to me."

He laughed.

I added: "Of all the cuckoo clocks I ever met, you're the balmiest."

"You can't insult me, Mr. Longwell. You merely amuse me. Yours is so typically the reaction of the mob to a man of great gifts."

I managed to meet his cold, flat eyes, and to speak up again, a little loudly:

"You're a homicidal maniac, that's what you are."

"No, not that. If I were, I wouldn't be ashamed of it—I'm absolutely honest with myself, Mr. Longwell—and I'd be the first to admit it. In my life, I've killed four persons. It's been necessary, but not enjoyable. Like killing a rattlesnake. A duty. A job to be done."

He spoke with such assurance—such perfect sincerity—that I had to believe that to him killing a human being was no more than exterminating a snake. I couldn't understand him, and then in a flash I had it. Cecelia said that Larry had compared him to a narrowheaded cat. He was evidently a human being with no more sense of morality than a tiger.

"You look astonished," he smiled. "And look at Shorty. He's amazed. He didn't know these things about me."

A slow grin passed over Shorty's face.

"You're quite a guy, partner. Myself, it kind of gets to me when I've given some guy a ticket to hell."

"It never bothers me," Jones said. "Except of course the possible consequences. With my dread of confinement I should dislike being caught. But I'm not going to be caught." His smile vanished; behind his glasses his eyes glittered.

He said, "I'll hate myself in the morning for letting my tongue race like this. But I'm exhilarated tonight—so exhilarated . . . You still think I'm a homicidal maniac, Mr. Longwell. I'll prove to you that I'm not."

He licked his lips, like a great blond cat.

"MY name isn't Conrad Jones. My name is—well, never mind. You'd recognize my true last name instantly. A name synonymous with wealth. A great, proud family. Behind me, Mr. Longwell, is a childhood on an estate in the East. Nothing was denied me. We were enormously wealthy."

"At twenty-one; when I was attending Princeton, I came into an incredible sum of money, from my dear old Aunt Lucy. A sweet woman . . . Oh, I was gratified. For I admire power, Mr. Longwell. The sheer beauty of power. And dollars are soldiers—willing, tireless soldiers."

"Out of college, I fell madly in love—and with a girl in all ways unworthy of me. A filing clerk. Imagine!

"We had a few dates—I showered her with gifts—and then one evening I went through the formality of asking her to marry me. I felt like a man stooping to rescue a kitten from a gutter. And then I received the most stupefying shock of my life. She refused me."

Jones smiled and nodded, as if understanding that we would be incredulous.

"Do you know why? Because she didn't love me. I was stunned. It was simply incredible. I took her home and went for a long drive. Even yet the memory of that night is like acid eating out my soul."

"Rising in me I felt a vast tide of anger. Imagine. All of my life I had had everything I wanted. Nobody had ever crossed me. I was rich. I could buy anything I wanted. Except Helen."

"Next night I saw her again. I blush to think of it, but I pleaded with her. I begged—even wept. It was a wholly new experience—exasperating, maddening. To want something I couldn't have. I groveled before her. And do you know what she did? She laughed."

Jones was not smiling now. His face was contorted with the memory of that humiliation.

"So I knew that she must die. If I couldn't have her, death could have her. I lay awake imagining her beauty turning to dust."

"I'll spare you the details. But a few nights later she had a casual date with another man. I followed them and killed them both. Was that the act of a homicidal maniac? Certainly not. It was the act of a man of power, Mr. Longwell.

"I thought I left no tracks. Unfortunately, I did. The police came. The evidence was circumstantial. My father and my other relatives—all powerful in that state—went into action. The army of dollars going to work—those faithful soldiers."

The smile that came back to Jones' face turned my stomach.

"A conquering army, dollars. They conquered the district attorney and his entire staff, and the police. The circumstantial evidence was ignored. The police picked up a tramp at random. He confessed . . . scarcely of his own volition, I should imagine. Later, he was executed.

"But by that time I had taken a new name and had come to Wyoming. That was the only stipulation of the district attorney—that I should get out of that state and never enter it again. He didn't want any other murders with evidence leading to my door embarrassing him. For he, too, thought I must be a homicidal maniac. "What an error!

"I was not and I am not. Killing a man is no fun. Neither is it a horrible thing. It is simply a thing that is occasionally necessary. . . .

"**H**ERE in Wyoming," Jones continued amiably, "I was very happy. I bought land—miles and miles of land. I can go to a ridge, Mr. Longwell, and gaze in every direction and know that I own everything I see.

"I hired men to work for me—men with criminal records. Why? Because with them I feel a certain kinship. In a lesser way, they are as I am. They too have sought power, and have brushed aside obstacles to achieve it.

"If you want a good, reliable man, Mr. Longwell, a man who will obey instantly and ask no questions and have no foolish qualms, hire a criminal.

"So all went well till last spring. In March a young chap named Ben Orr came to the ranch from Purple Gulch. In the crudest possible manner he tried blackmailing me. So foolish."

While Jones talked, I looked at Cecelia. Her story tied in here.

"It seems that Orr had been curious about me for some time, so he went to Cheyenne and spent days in the library, poring over old newspaper files. He must have been a thorough man, the soul of a research scholar—a pity he wasted his energies on blackmail. At last, in an eastern paper, he found what he was after.

"He found my photograph—an excellent likeness—and the news story about my arrest in connection with the murder of Helen and her escort. "You see, when the police had come for me that time, the reporters had accompanied them—and the story went out. A few hours later, after my father had set his dollar-army at work, I was released, and the police announced that they had questioned me merely because I was an acquaintance of Helen. I was absolutely innocent of the crime, they said.

"It gave the public a fine sense of police fairness—why, they had arrested even me in their scrupulous investigation.

"**W**ELL—Ben Orr was a bright fellow. If I had been innocent, he asked himself, why had I changed my name and buried myself from the world? Orr asked me for a sum of money. He threatened to spread the news that my name was not Jones.

"He even threatened to tip off the Cheyenne newspapers. It would be a wonderful feature story—that the young man calling himself Jones, who lived like a king on a vast ranch, was really the scion of a spectacular family."

Jones' voice became brittle.

"I didn't want that. I wanted peace, anonymity. I had promised my family that I would vanish completely and never trouble them again. If the press flaunted that lurid feature story my father would

be furious. He might change his will. To be sure, I'm very rich; but did you ever know a general who didn't want more soldiers?

"Ben Orr wouldn't listen to reason. I knew that if I started paying him money he would be bleeding me always. So I killed him. It was necessary. Wouldn't you kill a snake if it squirmed in to upset the peace of your household? He had to be removed, that was all. But to say that my action was that of a homicidal maniac is absurd.

"Investigators came. They found Orr's car, which I had doused with gasoline and burned. But they didn't find his body. It was out on a certain ridge, buried in a shallow grave beneath a rock pile.

"While they searched, my old fear of confinement returned. I resolved that if fate kept the body hidden, I would bury it in such a manner that nobody could ever discover it.

"They didn't find Orr's grave, simply because the ranch is so big. It would have taken them months to go over the entire ranch inch by inch.

"I was tremendously relieved. And I thought of a plan to hide Orr's body. It was a good plan. It is hidden well, now. It will never be discovered."

Jones sipped the last drops of his cordial, lit a cigarette, and smiled at us.

I asked, "But why did you kill Larry Brian? He was harmless. Certainly he didn't blackmail you."

"Oh no. He didn't do that."

"Then why—?"

Jones waved his cigarette. "We've talked enough about the past. I'm getting bored. Let's discuss the future. Certainly the future should interest you more than the past."

Again, his was a playful, cat-like manner.

VII

HE SUMMONED a house boy; cigarettes went round; our glasses were refilled. The servant's deftness scarcely disturbed the silence of the room.

A half-smile played over Jones' mouth; Shorty Ferguson sat contemplating his boots; and Cecelia was motionless, her chin cupped in her palm, her countenance stamped by grief. After the house boy disappeared, I attacked the big question mark hanging over our heads.

"Are you going to kill us?"

"Your bluntness, Mr. Longwell! It's appalling. Haven't you any sense of delicacy?"

"Well, are you?"

"No. But don't let your hopes soar. You and Miss Brian will have to die. It's unfortunate. You're both so young—on the threshold of life—so much in love . . . Unfortunate, but necessary. You understand my position in the matter, I hope?"

"Perfectly."

"That's good. Very good . . . And then possibly you'll co-operate with me—to make your take-off as much of an adventure as possible?"

"What are you driving at?"

He drank, pursed his lips, leaned back and stared at the ceiling. Then, selecting his words fastidiously, he said:

"I'm going to give you a gambler's chance to live. The odds, naturally, will be against you. Are you interested?"

"Go on."

"Have you ever been bored?" he asked.

"No. I've always been too busy scratching for a living."

"Excellent, Mr. Longwell! Really a profound remark. Boredom attacks only those who have leisure. It attacks me often, I regret to say."

"What has that to do with Cecelia and me?"

"Have a little patience, please. Don't rush me, Mr. Longwell . . . You know, I heard a great deal about you from Larry Brian. He thought you had the makings of a great animal trainer. But he described to me a nervous attack which you experienced. He called it arena shell-shock.

That interested me. We neurotics are so sympathetic with one another. Here am I, afraid of small, cramped places. There's Shorty, with his bad dreams of the men

he has slain. And there are you, afraid to enter the arena with lions and tigers. Correct?"

I could feel my heart beating faster.

"INTERESTING," Jones mused. "Vastly. And it has occurred to me that it would be a wonderful spectacle—to watch you in the arena, Mr. Longwell . . ."

My lips were suddenly dry. My nervous system quivered.

"Nothing doing," I snapped. "You're not going to get me into that arena."

"There are ways . . ."

"No," I said. "You can kill me. But you can't torture me first. And that's what it would be with my arena-shock. Torture. I won't stand for it."

"Won't you?"

"You could have me carried inside and dumped on the floor. But I wouldn't fight those cats. I wouldn't give you the pleasure of watching. I'd jump up and butt my head against the bars. I'd knock the consciousness out of my head before the cats got me."

"Would you? If Miss Brian were in the arena with you?"

Suddenly, Cecelia blazed into the conversation.

"Yes he would! We both would. We'd knock ourselves unconscious. The cats could kill us then and we wouldn't know. We aren't going to give you a—a Roman spectacle, Conrad Jones!"

Jones smiled, nodded his head. "Spirit! Splendid! Both of you have such quenchless spirits. I can tell you, I'm not bored any longer. . . ."

"But to return: I might, you know, have each of you tied hand and foot. Spread-eagled against the arena side. Perfectly conscious. No, you wouldn't like that . . . You'd prefer pitting your cunning against the cats. Well, I'll make it worth your while to fight. If you can stay half an hour in the arena, I'll give you freedom."

"Don't kid us."

"Oh, but you have my word for it."

I laughed. "After what you've told us,

you have the nerve to imply your word means anything?"

"I'm not a liar, Mr. Longwell. Surely this evening I've been nothing if not frank. Yes, if you can stay half an hour with the cats, you have unconditional freedom. Really, I doubt if you can stay ten minutes with those animals. But it means a great deal to me to have you try."

"Why?"

"Amusement. Lately the world has looked flat and gray. I need a stimulus stronger than any cocktail can provide. I want my interest in living whetted sharp again. Frankly, I don't want to tie you and throw you into the arena. There would be no contest, no battle."

"But if you go in fighting for your freedom, that will be a conflict indeed. Those cats with the desire to kill you—you with the desire to elude them—your fear heightened by your wretched nerves—"

I shook my head.

From his pocket Jones plucked a slip of paper, unfolded it.

"This would be an added stimulus, Mr. Longwell. Your freedom—and this. I drew it up this afternoon."

He handed me the paper. It was a check on a Chicago bank, made out to me. The amount was twenty-five thousand dollars.

A torrent of thoughts raced through my brain. If I could lick my arena-shock, and escape from the ranch, and cash this—

But no—no. Jones was playing it safe. His promise to set me free meant nothing. Even if I conquered those cats he would kill me in the end.

I ASKED, "If I accept, can I have regulation equipment when I enter the arena? A kitchen chair, a whip, revolver loaded with blanks?"

"Certainly, Mr. Longwell. Otherwise the cats would demolish you too rapidly. . . . But don't make up your mind tonight. Think it over. Give me your answer in the morning." He yawned, ordered carelessly, "Take them upstairs, Shorty."

So we trudged up the carpeted ramps, and after Cecelia had gone to her bedroom I asked Shorty, "Is this check any good?"

"Good as gold. One of Mr. Jones's largest accounts is in that bank."

"Well," I sighed, "I'll never cash it. Even if I should lick the cats, he'd never set me loose. Would he?"

"No. But I might."

"You—?"

Shorty shrugged. "He talks about being bored. He's not the only one. I get bored, too. And I get sick of his orders. I've always been a big man, partner, in my own field. I ain't used to this swallowing orders. Sure, if you stick with those cats I might help you get loose. If you'd cash the check and give me half."

A great light flared in my head.

I said, "Look here. Why can't we sneak away tonight? Half the money's yours."

"And have him stop payment on the check? No, partner; when we hit the trail from here, we've got to leave Jones dead. Of course, if you want to kill him tonight—but he's locked in his rooms by now, and they're something to get into."

"Why don't you call him out of his rooms and—"

"And kill him?"

I nodded.

Shorty shook his head. "Dead men get on your conscience, partner. You dream . . ."

"A fine two-gun man you are!"

The pupils of Shorty's eyes contracted. "Try something, partner, and see. If a man's in action—if he's fighting me—I can kill him neat. It's different to do it in cold blood."

I said, "If I lick those cats, will you help Cecelia and me—?"

"I'll consider it, partner. A bargain's a bargain—and Jones made one with you tonight. If he reneges, that's something else again. If he tried to kill you after you kept your part of the bargain—well, a man's conscience might let him sleep if he shot Jones, then."

"You're as anxious as Jones for me to go into the arena. Why?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no whoppers. Good night, partner. Get some sleep."

But I didn't sleep much that night.

THE animal house glistened white as frost in the mid-morning sunlight. It was a long rectangle of plaster-covered stone, running east and west. A few feet south of it, connected to it by animal chutes, the steel arena stood. It was circular, thirty-two feet across.

Jones this morning was decked out in a crisp linen suit, and ranged behind him stood eight or ten of the toughest-looking specimens this side of Alcatraz. They wore boots and wide hats, but their western garb couldn't disguise the big-city mobster in their faces.

I said, "You're crazy to expect me to put on a half-hour performance. Larry Brian's act only took six minutes."

Jones's teeth flashed. "Getting nervous, Mr. Longwell?"

"I feel fine."

"Good, good. Then we'll have a pleasant performance. By the way, the cats haven't been fed since yesterday morning."

"So what?"

"So they'll be very hungry."

He was trying to rattle me with that information, but he only revealed that he knew nothing about cat training. Larry always worked his cats on empty stomachs.

"Let's start," Jones said.

Shorty Ferguson trudged toward the animal house to send the cats into the arena.

What I feared most was the safety-cage. I was afraid my shell-shock would hit me, once I stepped inside. So I planned to stride right through the safety-cage into the arena, and wait for the cats there.

Following Cecelia toward the safety-cage, I summoned up all the advice Larry had given me. You had to be cold and calm, absolute master of yourself, before you could master cats. I wasn't. My hands wanted to flutter and it was all I could do to keep my grip on the kitchen chair and whip.

I'm convinced I would have folded up in the safety-cage except for one thing. It was a little thing maybe, but it loomed mighty big to me: there was no lock on the outside door of the safety-cage.

No circus would dream of presenting a wild animal act without the arena door strapped and buckled shut.

In his ignorance, Jones had stationed one of his ranch hands at that door, a big thick-nosed guy. With his automatic, he probably wouldn't be afraid of anything human. But cats aren't human.

A wild plan leaped through my mind. If I could maneuver it, I'd set the cats loose.

Cecelia and I walked right through the safety-cage, and I closed the door between it and the arena.

I gave her one revolver.

"Stand by the bars," I said. "Don't move—let me handle it. If a cat comes near you, shoot the wadding and powder into his mouth and eyes."

"Darling," she said.

"No matter what happens, don't move till I tell you to. I'm going to try setting the cats loose."

Her eyes widened and she whispered, "Oh darling—you can't—"

"Watch me."

We didn't talk any more, for inside the animal house Shorty Ferguson was sending the cats into the tunnels.

VIII

THE lions came first, all seven of them. As I saw King, the arena boss, emerging from the chute my shell-shock started landsliding toward me. For an instant my feet were glued to the floor.

Nervously, the lions paced and circled, curiously observing this trainer who stood like a man of wood. They hadn't been worked for weeks, and they were rusty and uneasy. Bill, a snappy young lion, slid over toward Sal. King growled warningly, and Bill growled right back. It looked as if there might be a scrap for arena supremacy right then.

To make matters worse, I heard the

tigers coming. Cecelia heard them, too.

She was at my side suddenly.

"Alex!" she said sharply.

Sight of her cracked the crust of my stupor. Oh, she was every inch Larry Brian's daughter that morning. But it was utter madness for her to be moving about in a dress that flared from her waist and fluttered about her legs. Never must a woman trainer wear a dress. Too tempting for cat-claws.

"Give me that whip," she commanded, grabbing my wrist. "If you're afraid I'll—"

"Get back!"

I jerked my wrist away.

"Afraid of cats!" she taunted.

And she slapped me smartly across the cheek.

Her psychology was correct. You slap a drunken man awake, and I was drunk on more subtle brew than ever came from a bottle. But she chose a terrible place to apply that psychology.

Cats are tricky and shrewd. They're quick to sense division of authority.

The lion named Bill, who was out of sorts anyway because King had bluffed him out of a nice love affair with Sal, chose this split-second to turn on us.

I saw him tense and leave the ground in a long dive for Cecelia.

It happened so abruptly that it caught my arena-shock unawares. My body and Bill's went into motion at the same instant.

With my chair out-thrust I danced in front of Cecelia. She didn't scream—not Larry's daughter. She scrambled. Back to her station by the bars.

Crashing into the chair came Bill, several hundred pounds of bone and tough lion sinew. His bared fangs gleamed and a growl thundered from his throat. His chest thumped the chair with such force that it was nearly wrenched from my grasp.

I sidestepped, and Bill went tumbling past, snarling savagely, his flying paws all tangled up in the chair-legs. He hit the arena floor, snapped round his body and crouched.

"Bill," I said levelly. "Seat, Bill. Seat."

I didn't want to blank him with my revolver unless I had to. I hate to see a trainer powder-blind and powder-burn his cats.

Again I saw him tense, and into the air he sprang, his unsheathed claws yearning to rip by flesh.

Sidestepping again, I used the whip this time. As his powerful body whizzed past I flicked him smartly on the nose. Yowling, he landed, twisted to face me. Before he could spring I cracked the whip across his nose again. Snarling and spitting, he backed up.

"Seat, Bill. Seat."

And I snapped the whip just in front of his nose, backing him away from me.

THE tigers were coming through their wooden tunnels from the animal house. As Bill slunk back from the whip, and turned, he saw the first tiger emerging from the chute.

The tiger was Dandy, a big Sumatran. He hated lions as cordially as Bill hated tigers.

King and I had both frustrated Bill, and he was sore-headed enough to tackle anything. When he saw Dandy his teeth flashed, and he sprang straight for his enemy's throat.

Dandy screamed and ducked. Bill missed his throat but his fangs raked the tiger's flank. Dandy whirled, leaped, and the air was yellow as he plunged on top of Bill.

But Bill had an advantage there, for the base of his neck was armored by his thick mane. Roaring, he lurched up and rolled, his paws swatting.

Into the arena the rest of the tigers were leaping. Nervously, all of them hissing, they regarded this scrap, but they didn't join in. That's tiger nature: you fight alone. If you get into a fight it's yours, and if your brother gets into one it's his funeral.

Not so with lions: they're gang scrapers. King, Joe and Jack pitched into the fray. They wanted to demolish Dandy.

To try breaking up that melee was use-

less. If this had been a regular circus performance I could have saved Dandy, for I would have had the assistance of animal men. As it was, to halt that battle would have been about as easy as halting a typhoon.

But I could try to localize it, to keep the rolling cats and their snapping jaws away from Cecelia.

On the rest of the tigers I kept a weather eye cocked, for the fight had agitated them. It was Dandy's Waterloo, but theirs might be next, so those blazing Sumatrans and Royal Bengals were milling and snarling and hissing. Sometimes they tried to climb the arena side. Or they started sneaking around the battle-field toward the safety-cage and Cecelia. My whip warned them back.

The non-fighting female lions accepted the situation calmly. At the beginning of the bout Sal leaped up to her pedestal. That gave me an idea. As the scrap rolled and thudded from side to side, I cracked my whip into peaceful territory, calling, "Seats!" and presently I pedestaled Beauty and Nancy.

The tigers caught the idea. I managed to seat four of them, and that left six cats on the floor, five of them battling.

The sixth, a tiger named Goldie, had crowded against the bars over by the chutes. Sometimes she pawed the chutes, wanting to return to the animal house, but the two men that Shorty Ferguson had delegated to watch over the tunnels had dropped the gate-bars before returning to Jones and his group.

HOW long that fight lasted I have no idea. Working cats, you lose all sense of time. I had even forgotten the existence of Conrad Jones. And I had been so occupied swinging my whip and hopping all over the place that my arena-shock had vanished.

Somewhere deep in my mind I knew that my arena-shock was licked for good.

And now the threshing violence was leaving the battle. No longer did the cats roll back and forth. Dandy was down with

King's teeth in his throat. Only the tiger's hind legs twitched, and then that ceased. Where the struggle had writhed there was bright blood and a bright tiger carcass in the sunshine.

Astride the dead tiger, King lifted his head and roared. His mane bristled and his tail twitched. The other lions loitered nearby watching, but none quite dared to challenge the arena boss.

Into that tableau I sent my whip, shouting "Seats!" King responded with a roar. I ignored him and started working on Joe, edging him toward his pedestal. He spat and snarled, hating to leave the kill, but at last his front paws rested on the seat. Then I heard Cecelia calling my name.

I whirled and glided toward her, thinking a cat had rushed her, but she was safe.

"Alex! Look!"

Astonishment and joy surged over me. For through the bars I saw Shorty Ferguson, his revolvers in his hands. He had herded Jones and the rest into a compact group. All their arms were elevated, their fingers clawing at the sky.

So Shorty had been on the level when he offered to free us and split that check!

"Quick," I said. "Get out of here."

Cecelia scurried toward the safety-cage. I covered her exit by moving toward the cats, the chair ready, the whip cracking. King jumped off the tiger carcass and faced me, snarling. I heard the door clang behind Cecelia, and I backed toward the safety-cage myself.

IX

I FORGOT something. Something I should have remembered. Nearing the safety-cage, I turned to open the door.

"Alex!" Cecelia was screaming.

Outside the arena I heard a revolver shot.

I didn't look. I couldn't.

For with airplane speed King was zooming toward me.

And then I remembered what I had stupidly forgotten.

I didn't shoot him. I didn't thrust my chair into him or whip him.

I sidestepped. He crash-banged against the safety-cage door. And landing on the floor, he shot me a glance that was more reproachful than murderous.

Good old King! He was being a good trouper. For Larry had taught him to make that ferocious charge whenever he left the arena. It lifted audiences off their seats. It looked as if Larry had slipped into the safety-cage just in time. But it was only the planned climax of the act.

I cracked my whip and worked King away from the door. This time, I faced him as I opened it. I backed into the safety-cage. King charged again, clanging the door shut.

Outside, the group still stood with hands lifted—all but one. Conrad Jones no longer stood. He lay dead on his face. Shorty said:

"When Cecelia screamed I gave a quick look. Jones tried going for his gun. Just as well, maybe. He's one guy who'll never trouble my dreams."

But I only half-heard him; I was going toward Cecelia.

The next quarter hour was busy. While Shorty kept them covered, I filched all the artillery from his prisoners, and we marched them inside the house to a windowless upstairs room. Shorty closed and locked the copper door.

"All right," he told Cecelia. "You stay here inside. Alex and I have business . . ." Business!

As we emerged from the house, I thought I understood. Shorty would make me endorse that check over to him. Then he would prod me behind the animal house and shoot me.

That was what came of making deals with a killer.

He said, "You'll want to be sending those cats back through the chutes. But first you and I have a little job inside the animal house."

My short hairs lifted.

"I dread it," Shorty said.

Of course he dreaded it. Hadn't he told me he always hated to shoot a man down in cold blood?

All at once I was seized by a panic as violent as arena-shock. I could only think of one weird attack that might work.

"Listen, I said, "if you kill me I'll—I'll never let you sleep again. I'll come back, Shorty Ferguson, every night and haunt you."

He gave me a quick, queer glance. Then he grinned.

"Why, partner," he said, "don't get so upset. Look at your gun. Break it."

I unbreeched it.

Those weren't blanks inside. Those were real shells.

"I WAS afraid the cats might get you down," he said. "It was mighty important to get you into that arena—mighty important to get all the cats out of the animal house. But I didn't want you killed in the process."

"But—"

He made a little gesture that stopped me, and went on in a rapid, unexcited voice, as if it were a routine business.

"I needed a clear twenty minutes in the animal house," he said. "I found what I was after. After the cats were out, I went into their cages. Carried a crow-bar and flashlight. Tapped the floor."

"There's a trap door in the floor of one tiger den. In a little cellar down there Ben Orr and Larry Brian are buried. That's why Jones wanted cats. He knew

no official would enter a tiger den looking for bodies."

I mumbled, "Larry—buried—?"

"Sure. I figured that some night before the cats came Jones must have moved Orr's body from wherever it was buried to that cage. Larry must have found that trap door while he was cleaning the cage. He likely found what was underneath and reported it to Jones, not thinking Jones had done it. So Jones went with him there and killed him and left him."

"Last night after Jones admitted the killings I thought it over. He said they were buried where no one would ever find them. The only place I could figure was under one of the cat dens."

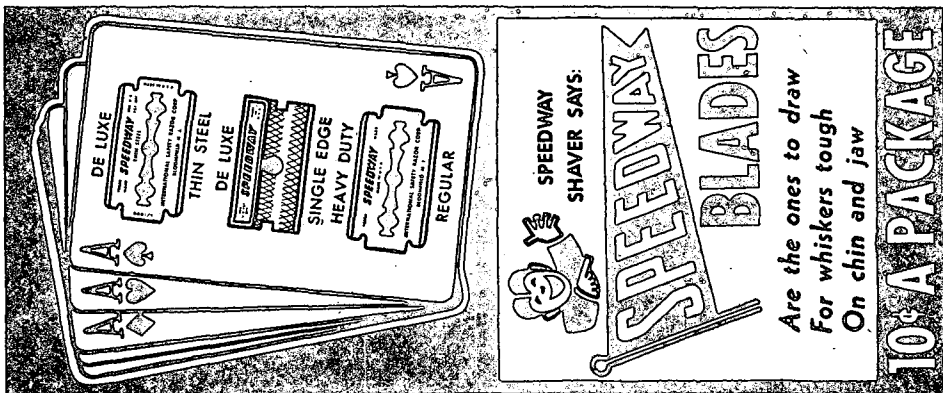
He stopped, and then suddenly he grinned at me again. But things were coming too fast for me now; my mind refused to sort them.

I said, "You're a killer. All you wanted was half the check. Why did you go to the bother—?"

"Partner," Shorty said, "I don't want half the check. It's yours and the gal's—guess you've earned it. . . ."

"Yes, I've killed my share, but not the way you think. That police circular saying I was wanted was a fake. It was the only way to get into Jones' confidence."

"My name ain't Shorty Ferguson. I'm Same Brace, State agent on the attorney-general's staff in Cheyenne."





He swung her over the wall,
while he felt the shadows reach-
ing out to catch him

Maker of Shadows

By JACK MANN

GREGORY GEORGE GORDON GREEN, young London investigator, is called to the Highlands at the request of Miss Margaret Aylener, seventy-year-old aristocrat who resides at The Rowans. Gees, as he is popularly called, is struck at once with the eeriness of the place—the four Rowans set in a protective circle about the house; the swirling fog that appears to teem with living shadows; and especially the tense, remembering atmosphere of the gloomy countryside,

which Gees feels still holds the essence of the crimes and iniquities that once it saw.

Miss Aylener is worried about her niece, Helen, last of the family. Her anxiety centers about a sinister neighbor, one Gamel MacMorn, who she insists has cast some spell over the girl.

It is her belief that Gamel MacMorn is a survivor of a long-dead, pre-Druidic race; that the monoliths, some of which still stand around his house, are the thirteen stones of life and death, each planted on the chest of a living being to insure a renewal of life—thirteen times thirteen lives—for the high priest of the ancient cult of Koré.

This story began in last week's Argosy

66

TWICE within the memory of the oldest living inhabitants, there have been strange disappearances. Each time, MacMorn had vanished, and each time returned, his youth renewed, posing as his own son. All these things may be mere superstition, but Miss Aylener is certain that MacMorn has once more begun to spin the shadows; that he "has cast the thread" linking Helen to him and preparing to renew his life through the sacrifice of hers.

She begs Gees to help her liberate the girl without destroying her sanity. Gees, who is a dabbler in archaeology and a student of the ancient, realizes that if what Miss Aylener says is true, the only means to free Helen is to kill MacMorn. This he refuses, pointblank, to do.

The next day he visits MacMorn's house; he assures himself that, from the position of the monoliths, the stones may very well be remnants of a sacrificial circle. He notes too a blood-red tree within the circle, sprung from what appears to be unusually fertile ground. And finally he observes that if the stones do form a ritualistic circle, MacMorn's house stands directly on the spot where the altar must have been.

MACMORN parries Gees' questions, assuming an air of perfect innocence. Later that morning, Helen and her fiancé, Ian Kyrle, arrive at the Rowans. Both know of Miss Aylener's beliefs and Helen makes fun of them. But Gees' thinks her lightness may cover . . . fear.

Ian confides in Gees; he is worried about Helen, too. Since she met MacMorn, she has seemed withdrawn from him; and in his sleep whispering voices warn Ian that she is in danger. He tells Gees of a strange drink MacMorn had once given them: two white liquids mixed to form a foaming blood-red nectar. Helen appears eager for another taste of that remembered potion and Gees offers to accompany her to MacMorn's house.

Gamel is not in; but the tantalizing fog is once more settling over the valley, and in its swirls Gees detects a curious odor—the hot, sweet smell of freshly spilled blood . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE LADY BEWITCHED

BACK to the normal, material world tomorrow. Away from all this. Gees was sitting on his bed in The Rowans' guest room, pondering over all the incredible things he had heard and half glimpsed since he had got there. A knock

at his door interrupted his thoughts, and, clad only in his dressing gown, he went and opened the door.

"Just off," Kyrle said. "Thought I'd come and say goodbye. Helen tells me you didn't see MacMorn, after all."

"She doesn't know I saw him this morning," Gees answered. "But you're late starting, with all that way to go, aren't you?"

"The light will hold for hours," Kyrle explained. "I'll make Edinburgh well before midnight. And if—" He hesitated. "If—if anything should happen—"

"On the road?"

"Lord, no! To Helen—at any time. I don't know what could, or if anything could. But if—and I got in touch with you—"

"If anything did, the whole situation would be altered," Gees said. "Get in touch with me by all means, but don't rely too much on me."

"What do you mean by that exactly?" Kyrle asked.

"Just that if anything did happen, it would be because of a bigger agency than mine," Gees answered gravely. "Something that has been built up and built up since the very beginning of time—and I'm not initiate in it. Nor do I know anyone who is. But get in touch, by all means."

For a minute or so Kyrle stood silent, thoughtful. Then—

"That's good of you. We'll be married in a month's time, thank heaven! Good luck to you—goodbye."

In a little while, from his window Gees saw Kyrle and Helen come out to the car, and saw the tenderness of their embrace. Then Kyrle got into the car and went away, his engine running smoothly and well, while the girl stood to watch his going. He looked back and waved his hand, and she too waved and then stood as before until the car had disappeared.

Then abruptly, amazingly, she dropped to her knees on the fine granite rubble, crouched, and with her hands lifted above her head bent forward until her forehead

appeared to touch the ground. Thirteen times she prostrated herself in this fashion, after which she rose to her feet again and entered the house.

Gees heard her close the door, and went back to his bed to resume his reflections on this case he had declined to undertake.

Over that crimson drink of MacMoran's Kyrle had said that he merely closed his eyes and opened them again and had had an illusion that an hour had passed. Had it been an illusion, though? Those dreams of which he had spoken indicated—what? Was it that MacMorn was not quite master of his immaterial, slavish crew?

"Unreal people, shadows of people, whispering at me in the night," Kyrle had said. Not here in Brachmornalachan, but away in normal surroundings . . .

MacMorn had been frank in his implication that it might be dangerous for Gees to stay long in Brachmornalachan. The man must have utter confidence in himself to give such a warning. Then the smell of blood driven on the wind to Gees and Helen, and the way, in which she had owned to being attracted as well as repelled by the scent.

Had she too closed her eyes for an hour that had seemed no more than a moment?

If ever a man radiated hypnotic power, MacMorn did. And inside the ancient circle, on his own ground and with the powers he could summon—if one accepted Margaret Aylener's fear as true—

EVEN here, guarded by the lines of the rowan trees and with her lover's kiss still tingling on her lips, Helen had made the prescribed obeisance of an unholy old ritual, prostrated herself in the thirteen genuflexions with which worshipers preceded the culminating invocation in darkness to the Unseen One. And on the altar, around and over which his house was built, MacMorn had made sacrifice that day, Gees guessed.

Yet, in this twentieth century, MacMorn dared do no more than suggest, surely? He might have influenced the girl hyp-

notically, but, short of kidnaping her, he could do her no real harm; and her aunt's suspicion of him was safeguard against any interference with her.

These fancies with which he might have infected her, such as the one which had induced her to prostrate herself, would all vanish after marriage.

However that might be, Gees could do nothing. One had to be practical, and there was nothing definite of which MacMorn could be accused. Any man was free to kill his own goat for food, in his own house, if he felt like it. Any man was free to offer people drinks, and if they accepted the offer and suffered no visible harm, the fact that he was enough of a hypnotist to make a colorless fluid appear crimson was no more than an interesting and even amusing trick.

As for attaching any significance to living in a Druidic or pre-Druidic circle, Avebury village was built inside one, and its inhabitants were good, sound, Wiltshire people, just like those who lived outside the circle.

One might say that MacMorn was a strange-looking man, but there was no crime in that. And to accuse him of unholy practices, or even of undue influence on anyone at all, would merely invite doubts of the one's own sanity.

There was just reasonable time for a hot, lazy bath before dinner.

AFTER dinner, Gees followed the two ladies to the drawing room for coffee. Helen pushed a settee forward and sat down directly in front of the fire.

"This wind reminds me of the night I got lost in Athens, auntie," Helen said, as she tossed her cigarette end accurately into the fire.

"You were a bad child," Margaret Aylener said, and smiled.

"It was your fault, for not teaching me Greek," the girl retorted, and smiled too. "Have you ever been to Eleusis, Gees?"

"And felt disappointed over it," he answered. "There is so little left. Though

whether there was ever much, beyond charlatanism—"

"There had been much," Margaret said, "but I think it was before the time of the mysteries of which so much is made. They were trying to re-create what had been. What the first people had known."

"The dark people who came here in ships," he suggested.

"Their predecessors," she dissented. "The very old ones."

"Auntie knows it all," Helen remarked. "You'd think, by the way she talks sometimes, she was chief bridesmaid when Tirzah and Ahirad were married, and the sons of the gods came down to the daughters of men till Deucalion took to boat-building."

She swung her long legs over the edge of the settee and sat up with a suddenness at which her aunt stared. "I feel too restless to sit still," she explained. "It's this wind, I think. Auntie, would you be too annoyed if I wanted Mr. Gees to come out for a little walk in the dark?"

"Mr. Gees, as you call him, may not feel like going out," Margaret said, rather coldly.

"It might be a good idea, Miss Aylener," he said, after a pause.

The girl stood up. "We'll go, then," she said decidedly. "Half an hour or thereabouts, Aunt Marge, to make me sleepy."

She went out, and Gees followed to find her donning a waterproof in the entrance hall. He opened the front door and looked out on a grayish blackness into which the light behind him penetrated less than a dozen yards. He closed the door and turned to the girl, who had advanced toward him.

"I think not," he said. "We'd get lost."

"Oh, no!" she retorted. "The feel of the path will guide us as far as the front gate, and I couldn't get lost in this place. Come along."

She opened the door again, and he followed. Twenty steps or so took them into a wet, driving fog such as the Scottish highlands and the west of Ireland experience, a blanketing density that hid the

lighted windows of the house. Helen took his arm, and their footsteps crunched on the granite chips.

"If you'd not been here, I'd have slipped out alone," she said.

"Being the madder of the two," he suggested.

"Quite possibly. And Eleusis means nothing to you?"

"Next to nothing. Those mysteries—fake, I think. Nothing is known for certain, but probably they were impositions on the credulous."

"I remember it, because I saw Gamel MacMorn there," she said. "Aunt Marge doesn't know he was there. Where—you know they still show the place where the oracle used to speak. She was tired, and I went alone. He was there, and we got talking—you know how one gets talking to anyone, even an acquaintance, you meet abroad. I'd never talked to him before, though of course we knew him, living so near each other."

"You talked about what?" Gees asked, keeping pace with her.

"I wish I could remember, but I can't. That's always seemed odd to me. Things he said about the mysteries. I know he seemed to believe in them as real mysteries, only he didn't talk about Demeter and Persephone in connection with them, but spoke of Kronos and—and—"

"Rhea?" he suggested, and paused as the gate appeared before them.

"Yes, it was Rhea," she agreed, "and the rest of what he told me I can never remember, though I can feel it, sometimes."

"That's a rather incomprehensible statement," he observed.

"Yes, isn't it?" She struck down the latch of the gate and thrust at it with her foot, swinging it outward. "I mean I feel myself a part of those mysteries. The crazy abandonment of them."

"Oh! So you know that part of it, then?"

"Know it?" She laughed, oddly. "Come outside, Gees. I can't tell you inside our wall." She led on, and he followed her

into the dense wet fog until the gate was invisible, and then stopped.

"NOT another step," he said determinedly. "We've got to find that gate again as it is, and I don't intend to lose myself and you out here for the rest of the night. It's too damp, and too cold."

"Anything else?" There was an odd note in her voice, and she held his arms tightly.

"What was it you wanted to say outside your boundary?" he asked.

"Just that—you see, the cult of Kronos and Rhea was more primitive, nearer to elemental things. I don't know how I know that, whether Gamel MacMorn told me or I read it somewhere. And—it's got me. I've never told Aunt Marge, and I daren't say anything of the sort to Ian, but it has. Intermittently, not all the time. Ian's sane—you don't know how I try to submerge that side of me by clinging to him. I trust you enough to tell you about it, Gees, in case you might be able to help me. To—to kill that other side, altogether."

"The other side being—Eleusinian?" he suggested.

"I think it must be that. An almost uncontrollable—desire to be what *they* were. Quite mad. Do you know the Venusberg music?"

"Quite well. You mean—that defines what you feel?"

"Expresses it. My love for Ian—his for me—quite apart from it. I feel like one in a Sabbath of whirling, dancing devils—yes, devils! Capable of any ecstasy, any abandonment of myself. Not human, but all animal. At the point to which they must have worked up—"

Abruptly she swung herself to face him, put both her hands on his shoulders and peered into his eyes, so closely that her own eyes were quite plain to his sight, and her breath warm on his mouth.

"So," she whispered. "At this moment, I wish you felt it too."

He grasped both her arms above the elbows, and held her back. "My child," he said, "your aunt is right, terribly

right. It isn't Eleusis that's bewitched you, but this Gamel MacMorn."

He felt her go limp in his hold, as if the momentary madness had passed. "But he— Oh, that's impossible—absurd!" she exclaimed.

"Impossible, absurd, and true," he insisted. "Listen here. You don't remember clearly what he told you at Eleusis?"

"No, I don't. But nothing—nothing like I've just told you. He didn't—didn't try to make love to me, of course."

"As you tried, just now with me," he said grimly, and kept hold on her arms. "Naturally he didn't. But the man is a master hypnotist, and he managed to plant in your mind this suggestion of evil—it is evil, Helen, and most deadly evil at that."

"I'd say that there, in that first real contact you had with him, he *got* you. Got your will, imposed his own on it, and planted the suggestion that you should go to see him here in his own place. Which you did, you and Kyrle. He doesn't want Kyrle, so with the help of that strange drink he got you all to himself, put Kyrle into a state in which he would remember nothing, know nothing—"

"But he didn't," she interrupted. "We bade him goodbye over the drink, and left only a minute or two after we'd had it, I remember."

"I believe, after you'd had it, MacMorn wiped an hour or more clean out of your consciousness, and Kyrle's consciousness too," he insisted. "The natural, conscious side of you knows nothing about it, of course, but he—MacMorn—took that opportunity of stimulating what he had already awakened in you, which is no more nor less than the devil that sleeps in every one of us, the instinct to unrestrained evil surviving in us from the very beginnings of humanity on earth."

"But I don't feel it as evil," she protested. "If—just now—if you'd felt as I did, given way as I nearly asked in words, I know I'd have been utterly happy—and so would you. Don't you see?"

"My dear girl, the instinct that was

driving you then is father and mother of lust and hate and murder, every evil there is, but it wouldn't drive or hold anyone on earth if it didn't give them a sense of just the glamour that makes its power over you. The devils men make and worship as gods promise unutterable joys—and give torment in the end."

"He—I—what must I do? Oh, what must I do?" she moaned.

Gees released his hold on her, and faced about beside her. "I'll tell you all I can as we go back."

FOR, abruptly, he had become conscious that they were not alone in the thick, clogging darkness. Cold, inhuman presences crowded on them on every side, incorporeal shadows that thickened the mist and moved in it with a life that was not life, but rather death-given sentience.

The girl felt them too, and clung to him, quivering with sudden terror. "Yes—Oh, which way? I'm lost, Gees! And look! The living dead are all around us in the fog! We're lost—quite lost!"

"Just keep your wits, Helen," he bade, trying to keep his voice steady, since he too knew some of the terror she felt. "We are not lost at all, and have only a few yards to go before we're back at the gate."

Realizing how easy it is to lose sense of direction in a night fog, he had noted every step they had taken, every turn or part of turn that either of them had made.

Now, disengaging himself from her fearful hold on him, he took her arm and impelled her to where, he felt sure, they would again encounter the gate.

Every step was a vast effort, for though the intangible things that she had called the living dead were of no more substance than the fog itself, they sucked at his strength so that he felt as if he walked in deep water, in part controlled by it.

He had to drag the girl along, for she was incapable of independent movement, and her audible breaths came and went catchily, uncertainly, almost in sobs. After a vast age of struggle he found that he had miscalculated their direction after all,

for they came to the wall surrounding The Rowans, but found no sign of the gate nor could Gees tell if it was to right or left of the point they had reached.

Now, as they both touched the wall, the sense of clogging presences about them increased, and Gees knew that these living dead were making a final effort to hold them back, drive them away from the wall and the house beyond it.

He took a few seconds for breath, and then put one arm around Helen's waist and the other behind her knees and swung her over the wall, setting her on her feet on the inside. Somehow he scrambled over after her—it was no more than waist-high.

He stood beside her, recovering breath and steadiness. Here, they were unmolested, but beyond the wall shadows swayed and swirled, darknesses on the thick darkness of the night. Helen turned and pointed away to the right, her arm a white line on the darkness.

"I think the gate is there," she said.

"And I think it's the other way," Gees dissented. "Before we begin looking for it, though—you understand a little more clearly, now?"

"I'm so tired," she half-sighed. "So terribly tired, Gees."

"So am I, after that," he said grimly. "But if I tell you what you've got to do to save yourself, will you do it?"

"I'm so tired, I tell you," she insisted tremulously.

"If I say what to do, *will you do it?*"

"What? What do you want me to do?" she asked, sluggishly.

"See here!" He grasped her arm and shook her, roughly. "Do you want to become no more than a shadow on the night, like that?" He pointed beyond the wall with his free hand.

"No." But the reply was listless, uninterested, as if she did not really care.

"Does Kyrle's love mean nothing to you?" he demanded harshly.

"Yes. What is it you want me to do?"

"First, never go out here alone, either day or night."

"Yes, I understand," she assented, still in that flat, lifeless way.

"Say it," he insisted. "What is it that you must not do?"

"I must never go out here alone, either by day or night," she said.

"Repeat that, please. Get it engraved on your mind."

She repeated the words. Then—"I'm so terribly tired," she said.

"**I** KNOW." He refrained from attempting to impress more on her. In her present state, he knew, the one prohibition would sink in so as to have power over her, but to perplex her with other biddings or forbiddings might spoil the effect. He took her arm and led her to the left.

"We'll find the path to the house," he said.

A dozen paces brought them to the granite chips, and Helen turned toward the gate and tried to break from his hold. "Not that way," he said. "The house is behind you."

"Calling," she almost whispered. And again—"Calling."

"You forget." He would not ask what she meant by the word. "Tell me again—what is it that you must not do on any account."

"I must never go out here alone, either by day or night," she said, and with the words turned toward the house. "I'm so very tired, too."

She leaned heavily on him all the way to the door, and, entering after he had opened it, turned and faced him.

"Will you tell Aunt Marge I've gone straight to bed, please?" she asked. "And"—a faint smile grew about her lips—"you were right—the glamour, I mean, and the reality. I know, now. Goodnight, Gees."

He watched her ascend the stairs, saw that she turned at the bend and lifted her hand to him in a little gesture of farewell.

The pale yellow of her hair showed white against the paneling, and her slender figure drooped wearily. When she had gone, he entered the drawing room.

Margaret Aylener, standing by the man-

tel, turned from gazing into the ashy fire. "Was it a good idea?" she asked, with a tinge of irony.

"And bad," he answered. "Both. Miss Aylener, get her away from here. Take her away—anything. Don't let her stay here, that's all."

"Do you still say you can do nothing?"

"No more than I have done," he answered. "We went outside the gate, and *they* came round us. Suffocatingly. Whether *he* was there too, I don't know. but she half-yielded to some hypnosis—she was not under control, but open to suggestion. I suggested all I dared, took advantage of her condition to insist that she should not go out here alone, and I think the suggestion is fixed, but I'm not sure. Even if it is fixed, it won't endure so get her away, soon."

"I have been thinking," she said, quite calmly. "I suppose, if I realized everything I have, I should not rank as a poor woman, Mr. Green. The total amount would be between forty and fifty thousand pounds."

"Not exactly poor," he commented.

"I will give you half that sum if you bring about Gamel MacMorn's death," she said, as quietly and evenly as before.

"I see." He too spoke very quietly. "There is a thick, wet fog outside tonight, too dense for me to travel by my headlights. If you don't mind, I'll start back very early in the morning."

She gazed at him steadily, and, as when he had first seen her, he knew she was very lovely. Her age was an incredibility, he felt.

"Why, yes," she said. "It is a long day's journey to London, by road. And since I rise late, I will say goodbye now, Mr. Green. I am so sorry you have had the long drive here to, so little purpose."

CHAPTER VIII

FAREWELL TO SHADOWS

THE reluctant day was not an hour old when Gees nosed the Rolls-Bentley out into still, white mist. Gees could

only see a dozen yards beyond the radiator cap. Miss Aylener's servant, the strange Callum, guided him to the drive in front. The rowans were giant ghosts looming high, guarding clouds on the mist.

With Callum walking beside him, Gees drove to the gate that he and Helen had failed to find on their return last night. Passing by the open gate, Gees reached out his hand, and Callum took his tip with respectful thanks.

Then the car was rocking and swaying along the track toward the post office and cottages, and The Rowans was no more than an incredible memory behind.

Little less angry than he had been when he bade Margaret Aylener goodbye the night before, Gees drove with about one-tenth of his brains, and hotly resented Miss Aylener's calm suggestion of murder with the rest. Hire him like a paid Florentine assassin, eh? The woman was crazy.

Of course she had cause to hate and fear MacMorn, for the adventure with Helen in the fog had proved that the girl was in real danger, but—to avert it by buying a man to murder—He cursed under his breath, and jerked sharply to attention.

The car was half off the road. Either because the surface was bumpy or because he'd not been paying attention, the wheel had pulled against his hands and swerved to the right. Just ahead loomed blankness where solid ground should be.

He got out to go look over the edge of a pit which, if he had not caught himself up in time, would surely have wrecked him. Leaving his engine running, he went back along his tire marks, and saw that he had swerved off the main track some thirty or forty yards back—had made almost a right-angled turn, in fact. He could not remember swinging the wheel, but he must have, somehow.

Then, looking for the tire track to guide him through the fog back to the car, he saw them in process of being wiped out—by nothing. The spongy sidetrack appeared to even itself out with the rest of the ground. As if someone were busy

with a rake or broom or hoe, the earth lifted from underneath and leveled.

And he could *see it being done!*

His hair crisped at the sight: it might have been the elasticity of the peaty soil, but the swiftness with which the tracks vanished pointed to some sentient agency.

The car was drowned in the still whiteness that prisoned him from normal things. Fortunately, he had left the engine running, and could guide himself back by the sound. He faced toward it, took a step in that direction, and *the sound ceased!*

NOW, unless someone had switched off the ignition, this was an impossibility. His gasoline gauge had showed six gallons that morning and a Rolls-Bentley engine does not cease running of its own accord. A new rage possessed him. Somebody—MacMorn?—had waited for him to get beyond sight of the car, and then had shut off the motor so that he should lose himself, perhaps fall into such a pit as lay just ahead of his car. Yet, why? He was leaving the place. He had given up—

As abruptly as when Helen had been with him the night before, he realized that he was not alone.

Shadows thronged in the whiteness, darkened it as they wove figures about him, patterning the air with strange, half-human shapes, never quite in his sight. When he tried to look directly at any one of them, it was not there, but just aside from the line along which he gazed. By an effort he shut his mind to them, managed to concentrate on the fact that he was faced toward the point at which he had heard the purring exhaust of the engine. He must go in a straight line ahead to find the car. Only a few yards, and he would be in sight of it again.

They were trying to turn him, luring him to look aside and so lead from the line he must follow. He dare not let them. And suddenly Gees knew fear.

He advanced, looking straight before him. The shadows in the fog closed in on him, grew more numerous, and he felt the loss of strength they had imposed on

him before. They took his human vitality and used it to supplement their sub-human intangibility, sucked at his physical strength and grew as tangible as wreaths of the fog itself, pressing on him, striving to divert him from his way—and then fading to nothingness as with a gasp of relief he saw the car.

He had won! Both attempts at leading him astray—killing him, perhaps—had failed. And, as the car came to sight again, he heard the purring exhaust as when he had left it. The engine had not stopped at all! Had it, though? Yet, if it had been stopped and started again, he would surely have heard the self-starter.

He got back into the driving seat. The shadows he had seen or imagined—but not imagined, for no imagination could produce this bone-weary exhaustion—the shadows he had *seen* no longer patterned the mist. He was alone. How had *they* closed his ears, shut him away from the sound that would have guided him back here?

He backed slowly away from the pit into which he had so nearly fallen. He had only to reverse in a straight line, and the car must come to the track from which he had diverged. The wheel tracks lengthening in front of the radiator as he backed would show him if he swerved to either side. Thick though the fog might be, it gave him eight or ten yards of sight beyond the nose of the car, enough for holding to a straight line.

But *the car left no wheel tracks!* Sweat streamed down his body. Here he was with almost the most modern of material things, presumably in a material world; and the ton and a half of metal under his control appeared to press as lightly on the peaty earth as might Ariel on a blade of grass.

Well, keep the wheel straight—and he knew that the most difficult thing in driving is that of keeping a car in reverse to a straight line—and eventually he must reach the track from which he had diverged. Thirty to forty yards, he had walked when he left the car. Now, he

backed and backed, fifty or sixty yards. He stopped. The wheel must have swung in his grasp without his knowing it.

He got out and, without losing sight of the car this time, found that he had been proceeding parallel with the track and about half a dozen yards distant from it. Had he kept on, he would eventually have backed into the wall of The Rowans, or else, circling unconsciously, backed into the pit from which he had just escaped.

HE GOT in again and drove on. Warned by his experience, he kept his whole attention on his driving, and presently the gray bulk of the post office showed dimly.

Passing it, he saw the postmistress, Bathsheba Gralloch, standing on the doorstep, gazing at him. She gave no token of recognition, though he passed at so little distance that with one forward step she could have shaken hands with him. He fancied or saw a glimmer of evil amusement in her dark eyes, and, hating her unreasonably, violently, remembered the ham in the back of the car.

He passed on.

As he went up from the valley of the loch and away from Brachmornalachan, the fog thinned. When he reached the three-way crossroads and looked back, the white density from which he had emerged, ringed by its crouching hills with their intermittent clumps of ragged, wind-tortured firs and pines, lay like a sea of cotton behind him.

Back in the normal world! No shadow shapes marched or wove figures on the haze, here, no stone reared to show a graven Name to the life of everyday. Not that any life appeared, except the tiny, grayish blobs in the far distance that he knew were grazing sheep. But—free of it!

He felt intense relief. It was blessed to realize that, with her proposal of the night before, Margaret Aylener had put acceptance of any mission she might offer out of the question. He had bade her goodbye, finished with her and with

Brachmornalachan—and with MacMorn!

He swung on to the main road, and was about to accelerate when he saw, beside the way, a scrub-filled pit that had probably been a stone quarry, and stopped beside it, remembering Bathsheba Gralloch as she had watched him pass, and especially remembering the look in her eyes.

He got out, went to the back of the car, and took out the ham he had bought at the post office. Swinging it, he let go, and heard it crash down in the scrub that lined the quarry. A waste of twenty-five shillings, possibly: he had no real reason to doubt that it was a perfectly good ham.

On the other hand—

He resumed his seat at the wheel, and presently the tires began their normal humming. Scent of peat fires, of springing vegetation, and the sun climbing up the east—

A modern road, designed and graded and built by practical engineers for modern, practical use by sane people going about their material business.

Steadily, swiftly, the distance between him and Brachmornalachan increased.

CHAPTER IX

EARTHLY INTERLUDE

NEARLY two years before when he had established his confidential agency in Little Oakfield Street off the Haymarket, and had hesitated whether to engage a secretary, an office boy, or both, as staff, he had eventually decided that a secretary might not be all he would need, but would certainly be all he would afford.

He had interviewed seven applicants for the post, and had inquired of each in turn whether he might kiss her. Three of them said he might, three were modestly doubtful, and the seventh negatived the suggestion flatly and decidedly, whereupon he engaged her.

She gave her name as Eve Madeleine Brandon, and, until Gees' father, General

Sir George Green, discovered, that she was daughter of one old friend of his and niece of another, Gees himself was so doubtful of the name that he wanted to ask her whether she belonged to the Smith family, in reality.

She had brains, good looks, and charm; she never let her employer forget that he might *not* kiss her, and they got on so well in every way that Gees frequently congratulated himself on his choice.

On the morning after his return from Brachmornalachan, as he entered the room in which she worked or waited for something to do, she put down the novel she had been reading and greeted him coolly.

"Book-of-the-Month, eh?"

"I'm so bored," she explained.

"Any inquiries?"

"The usual morning sheaf," she said.

"I have declined them all. Lost property, divorce evidence, psychic seekers—nothing you would care to undertake, I know. Rather an odd one this morning—I don't know why the man should think you'd regard it as between mumps and murder. An innkeeper in the New Forest thinks his barmaid is robbing the till."

"Umm-m! Initial consultation, two guineas, too. But then, some while ago, a firm with a turnover of about a million a year found its accounts a penny out, and in tracing that penny the auditors uncovered frauds amounting to tens of thousands."

"And what has that to do with a New Forest barmaid?" she inquired.

"I dunno," he confessed. "Have a cigarette? So will I. But if I went and looked round that pub, the barmaid might lead me to a plot to assassinate a Cabinet Minister, or a burglary at the Mint, or a scheme for making Hitler king of Jerusalem. She might not, of course."

Miss Brandon frowned, and asked: "How did you get on in Scotland?"

"In Brachmornalachan, you mean," Gees amended. "For one thing, I met the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"That is not unusual, I believe," she commented softly.

"Her being close on twice my age makes it so, though," he said. "Then, I was offered something over twenty thousand pounds to complete what I was asked to do, and turned the whole thing down and came back."

She gazed at him gravely, steadily. "I'd better finish off the morning's inquiries, and then get on with my book," she said.

"And I gave twenty-five shillings for a ham, and threw it into an old stone quarry to lose it," he added. "It looked like a good ham, too."

"Did you have good weather?" she asked sweetly.

"And a very attractive girl took me out in the dark after she'd met me for an hour or so, and tried to get me to make love to her."

Miss Brandon frowned heavily. "I'd better dispose of these inquiries," she said. "Unless you'd like to—"

"Put them aside for the present," he bade, with a return to seriousness, "and get out your book. Even if I've turned down the case, we must have a record. So I'll dictate it while the flavor of Brachmornalachan still hangs around my gills. Then I'll discuss it with you, and after that I think I'll go see the barmaid in the New Forest. A good solid barmaid with itchy fingers. You don't know how thoroughly wonderful that sounds."

He dictated for the best part of a half-hour. At one o'clock, he went out to lunch and returned about three to find her sitting idle at her desk with the neatly finished typing laid on her machine.

BY THE look of it, the book of the month is like that barmaid in the New Forest—doesn't interest you any more than she did me. Have you marked and learned and mastered my story?"

"Marked and learned," she answered. "That is my limit."

"I see. This is London, of course. Yes. You're skeptical." He made it half a question. She looked up at him, gravely.

"Even you turned it down," she said. "What is it? Ghosts?"

"I don't like the word, Miss Brandon. To your question—no."

"Then—" She left it at that, and waited for his explanation.

"You know you can save life by transfusion of blood?" he asked.

"You don't mean—?"

"Take the word, 'transfusion,' and analyze it," he suggested. "Not merely transmission, or transfer, of blood from one person to another. But fusion. That is, complete annexation of the blood to the person needing it. It becomes a part of that self; is fused in it. In that way, as I see it, MacMorn has learned to transfuse not merely blood, but life itself. To fuse another life into his own, and when that wears out another, and yet another—how many, naturally, I don't know."

"But you can't—he wouldn't go on being MacMorn," she objected.

"Oh yes he would. That, don't you see, is where the shadows come in? Not the soul—he doesn't need that. But the principle, the vital physical force—call it what you like—that makes the human body a fit habitation for the soul all through a lifetime. That, I believe, is what he transfuses to himself. D'you know any old Egyptian beliefs?"

"I've read of them, of course," she answered.

"Yes. Most people have. According to them, three entities made up a man, in addition to his physical organism. There were the *ka*, and the *bai*, and the *khôu*, distinct entities. When an adept of evil like MacMorn transfuses a life to himself, one of those three is set wandering, homeless and earthbound, and never going far from the rest of the personality of which it was a part during the mortal lifetime of the whole!"

"And so the shadows MacMorn makes stay near him."

"Far more than he has made—thousands more," he said.

She shook her head. "I don't understand it," she said. "Why thousands more? There are not thousands of—adepts of

evil, you called him. You say—this report—you only saw three people at his house.”

“Possibly only two. Partha may have been the man who came to the door, for all I know. No, there is only one MacMorn, to my belief at any rate.

“But the circle, and the altar over which MacMorn’s house is built to keep it intact as a dwelling place for what was worshiped there when all the stones were standing. I think—this is all assumption—I think that whatever was worshiped there still has power. Whatever it was, absorbed—transfused to itself—lives by the thousand in far back time, and so made the shadows.”

“While It retains power, they are bound to that place, bound to It and to obey It. Which was why they tried to destroy me, when I was leaving. I’d shown MacMorn I either knew or suspected the truth about him and was antagonistic, and he passed on the information to his—deity.”

“In that case, how do any Ayleners survive?” she asked.

“For one thing, they don’t. They’re fined down, now, to Margaret Aylener, who is powerless against MacMorn, and her niece Helen whom he intends to transfuse to himself for the sake of another span of mortal life. For another thing, the four rowans about the house.”

“The trees protect from him?” She sounded derisive.

“Throw out the old belief in the world-ash as the fountain and fore-bringer of human life, and *still* the tree has power,” he asserted. “Then why not as protection from what MacMorn serves? Set in a quadrangle of the rowans while they are in their own house, Ayleners need not fear MacMorn. He caught Helen and put his spell on her far from that house. At Eleusis, and could you find a more significant parallel than that?”

“Parallel?” she asked. “I’m not—not accepting all this—it’s too fantastic. But I’d like it all clearly.”

“If you look up the *Oxford Companion* off the shelf in my room some time, and

turn up Eleusis,” he said, “you’ll find it says that the Eleusinian mysteries culminated in a rite in a darkened hall, where the worshipers were shown visions in flashes of light.

“Tableaux posed in front of torches thrust up through the floor, probably—I don’t think Eleusis in historic times ever went deeper than trickery and attempted reproduction of older rites, though of course there can be no certainty about that now.

“But MacMorn’s house is built over an altar thousands of years older than anything at Eleusis, and *if* sacrifice at that altar has been carried on to an extent that keeps its god there, *if* MacMorn is priest to that god—”

“Then Eleusis is only a faint parallel to his house,” she suggested.

“I thought it all over on my way back, and talking it out with you helps to clarify the thought,” he said. “Your questions are useful—”

“Another question,” she interrupted. “If this girl—Helen, and by what you say of her I dislike her intensely—if she is in real danger, why did you give it up and come back?”

“WE HAVE had two cases of the type to which this belongs, since I started this agency and engaged you. In this case, if I admit the threat to Helen Aylener, that threat emanates from an ordinary human being, a rather peculiar-looking man, I own, but to the best of my knowledge a perfectly law-abiding one whom I can’t *accuse* of anything, whatever I may think of him.

“He has made the acquaintance of the girl, invited her and her *fiancé* to his house and given them a drink. So what? If I allege that he’s living on the life of a woman who disappeared when she was a girl, I invite questions as to my own sanity. Medically, transfusion of life in the way MacMorn may or may not accomplish it is an utter impossibility. As for the shadows, spots before the eyes make a favorite line in patent medicine advertise-

ments. And what's a shadow, anyhow?

"I might sit in Brachmornalachan till the birth of Helen Aylener's fourth baby and miss my chance at whole rows of New Forest barmaids. On top of all which, my goat was gotten nicely by the suggestion that I could have twenty thousand pounds if I'd only wipe MacMorn off the face of the earth."

"You think the god—whatever it is—still exists?" she asked.

"Gods exist only by virtue of belief in them," he answered. "That is, the gods within human conception, distortions of the real Power behind things. I feel sure the god of MacMorn's altar still exists, because of the shadows, for one thing."

"The multitude of human sacrifices made on that altar in old times must have built up a god of very great power, and the way in which lives were absorbed—transfused—and the resulting shadows bound near that spot would maintain life in the god."

"Destroy worship of it, belief in it, and it will cease to exist, but while a priest of the cult remains to serve it and stand as master of the shadows, minister to the god, it will live and have power inside the circle marked by the stones as its dwelling place."

"In reality," she observed thoughtfully, "you found—nothing."

He laughed, and offered his cigarette case. "What is reality?" he asked. "Are you and I both real as we sit here, or does one of us exist only in the imagination of the other? The whole universe may be unreal, no more than a picture in the brain of an ant belonging to some other universe. There is no ultimate, conclusive proof of the reality of anything."

"Well, of course, if you're going to strike that note, I give up."

"More questions?" he asked.

"What is this antipathy to iron in his house?" she asked.

"Ah! I wondered if you'd spot that. Fellowship with the Daoine Shih—the very old ones who are only half-human. They

avoid iron—it is in some way a plague to them. I don't understand it—there it is."

"And they are—what are they like?"

"Mainly responsible for the legends of fairies—they let themselves be seen by humans, at times. Loathly things, far below human standards. Driven out of sight by the first savages who wandered into the lands they occupied, long before any civilization dawned."

"You can meet them dematerialized at séances; posing as Napoleon or a departed relative for the credulous, trying to mix with full human beings in that way. Rags of mind, mainly cunning and deceit, in or out of semi-material travesties of bodies, some horrible and some merely grotesque."

"And how do you know all these things?" she asked caustically.

"Soaked them up," he answered. "Fair lady, I was not always a policeman, and things quite beyond proof always interest me. I claim to be so far proof against influence by them as to be able to study them without harm to myself, too. So I studied. MacMorn recognized that I had, and got a certain amount of panic over me in consequence."

"And now you wait for another case," she observed.

"We wait for another case," he corrected her. "Lord, it was only yesterday morning I chucked that ham into a quarry in Scotland, and it feels about two years ago! Miss Brandon, I've got an idea. Let's close down tomorrow, and I'll turn out the buzz-wagon and take you to that New Forest pub for a bread and cheese and beer lunch. You can get off with the proprietor while his wife isn't looking, and I'll see what the barmaid is like. How does it appeal to you?"

"All but the proprietor part."

She nodded contentedly at his back as he went out through the doorway. He had never suggested anything of this sort before—she had never ridden in that wonderful car of his. The invitation had been given in a friendly way only, but—did

it mean that he was about to wake up and turn human, see her as other than his secretary?

If so, she would know how to manage him.

CHAPTER X

PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

TAKING the cross-over from the Guildford road to the old lane over the Hog's Back, next morning, Gees said: "I have never driven a more silent passenger. Not that I drive many."

"Do you object?"

"Not a bit. There are so many fools on the roads these days, especially near London. You have to concentrate to dodge them."

"You seem quite sure of your way."

"Looked it out before starting," he explained: "The wise man—I'm one—always plans his route before he turns out. The others stop beside the road at intervals and consult a map, which will tell you everything except how to fold it up again. We wise ones get there first."

She made no comment. Gees took the Winchester road, swinging over its switch-back undulations as one might drive a boat across the crests and hollows of an unquiet sea.

At a distance of three miles or less from the city, the flies came. . . .

A little black cloud, compact as a swarm of bees, appeared to leap over the low hedge on the near side of the car—and envelop both him and Eve in a blinding, buzzing mass.

She cried out as he braked to stop, and, quick though he was, one front wheel struck the guard rail forcefully as a northward-bound car flashed past them. Had he swerved to the right instead of pulling off the road, the speed at which the other car was going would have meant sure and sudden death to them both.

Great, blue, buzzing foulnesses, thousands of them. Both he and Eve Brandon fought at them with their hands. Although he had been going at a good clip,

they had got in behind the windshield, and the car was alive with them. He beat at them with his hat, and smelt freshly shed blood, as when he and Helen Aylener had walked away from MacMorn's house in Brachmornalachan.

Then, suddenly as it had appeared, the swarm rose up, and swung back over the hedge. Their buzzing grew faint and ceased, and—assurance that he had not dreamed it all—hundreds of dead or dying flies littered the floor rug and seats.

"If you'll get out, I'll clean up a bit."

She stepped on to the grass, while he threw out the seat cushions, took up the rug and shook it into the road, and knocked out all that remained on the floor of the car. All this in complete and grim silence. The smell that had struck on his nostrils was in his mind.

"Now you can get back," he said, after he had replaced the cushions and deposited his hat in the locker.

"I felt—still feel quite sick." She seated herself as she spoke.

"M'yes," he observed unsympathetically. "I could have understood it better if it had been July, but even then I've never seen a swarm like that in this country. We'll stop in Winchester and get you a spot of brandy. You look quite peaky over it. Or shall I drive you to the station at Winchester and send you back by train?"

"Certainly not!"

He drove on. "Did you—er—smell them?"

"That was what was so sickening," she said. "A beastly smell—I know no other word for it. Utterly repulsive."

"Yes." He remembered Helen Aylener's saying that she both disliked and liked an exactly similar smell. Over its recurrence here, and the appearance of the flies, he refused to think.

In a hotel lounge in Winchester he and Eve sipped neat brandy, and went on. He scarcely observed the notice: *Beware of wandering cattle* as they entered the forest. Here, with spring foliage at its gayest in the brilliant noon sunlight, he slackened his pace.

They dipped down from a crest toward a shaded hollow from which the road rose again, straight and straight under an arch of green. To their left, a half-dozen forest ponies grazed on a stretch of sward. There were rushes and reeds fringing a stream in the hollow—

The brakes saved them.

THE pony nearest the road had leaped directly in front of the car. Had Gees been going faster, he could not have averted a crash. As it was, the front bumper was not two feet from the animal when the car came to a standstill.

With a lurid oath he got out, and as his foot touched the ground the pony leaped away with a terrified snort and disappeared in the brushwood. The other five beasts went on grazing quietly.

"Sorry I cursed, Miss Brandon," he remarked, getting back to his seat and easing off the hand brake. The car moved on.

"It was justifiable," she rejoined. "Quite a—fruity effort, too. Do you often have adventures like these on the road?"

"As nearly as I can remember, no."

"Perhaps I'm a Jonah," she suggested, as they began the ascent beyond the hollow. "Inexplicable flies, and a mad pony—"

They came out to open, heather-covered waste, and still the road ran straight and straight, with no life but their own on the landscape. But Gees kept to thirty miles an hour as carefully as in a restricted stretch. "We'll have lunch at the first likely place."

"But what about the barmaid?"

"She'll never know what she's missing," he answered. "I'm not going near her, and we're not going back this way, either. Nor am I telling you which way we are going back. I'm smitten with a hunch."

"So am I," she admitted, after a pause.

"Good! We'll have lunch, and not swap hunches till we get home."

"But why am I not to know our way back?" she asked.

"Your mind might leak," he explained. "And I'm keeping mine tight shut, too. We've been annoyed quite enough, for one day."

CHAPTER XI

FEAR IS A SHADOW

THERE was a big limousine with white ribbons stretched between the front corners of its roof and the headlamps, at the end of a row of five cars, parked in front of a countryside hotel like the one where they had lunched. Gees nodded at them as he drove past. "Just as well we didn't," he remarked.

"What didn't we?" she asked, after thinking it over.

"That's where *she* lives," he explained. "Works, anyhow. With a wedding party in the place, I'd never have a chance to vamp her and find out she bilks the cash register. And now, next on the left."

"Did you mean to take the next on the left when we started out this morning?" she asked.

"No. I began to mean it about a minute ago. I'm going to navigate by the sun from now on, and don't ask any more about it."

Any road, he told himself, except the one by which he had planned to return. Keep roughly parallel with the coast for awhile. . . .

"About that report you dictated yesterday," Miss Brandon remarked after he had turned left into a rather narrow road, obviously not a main highway like the one they had left. "Do you mind talking about it?"

"I see no reason why I should," he answered non-committally.

"Then—can you tell me—why are all the old gods such fierce beings? Except the Egyptian deities, perhaps—Osiris and Isis were fairly reasonable and polite. But the others—even the last of them, the Roman Jupiter—were no more than bloodthirsty hobgoblins and most of the earlier ones were simply unspeakable. The Hebrew Jahveh was more often angry

than not, and had to be propitiated with all sorts of sacrifices."

"The Egyptians got an easy living in the Nile Valley," Gees said, "and therefore nature appeared to them as fairly benevolent. They patterned their gods on their own way of life—and so did all the other tribes and civilizations of antiquity.

"Most of them found nature fierce and evil. They saw life as a perpetual struggle against unyielding cruelty, some sort of supreme rule, to their belief, which perpetually tortured them by famine and storm and war, and they attempted propitiation out of their own experience. Life was an evil thing, therefore the gods who gave it must be evil, and had to be approached by evil and cruelty."

"It sounds reasonable," she reflected.

"Is," he insisted. "As life got kinder, the gods became less evil, until—as you said—under the *pax Romana* Jove was no more nor less than an unpleasant old roué, everlastingly dodging away from Juno after some mortal maiden. Where you get a fierce, hard life, like the old Norse civilization, the gods are fierce and hard too. Man has made gods in his own image from the very beginning of time."

She nodded and fell silent. With the sun striking over his right shoulder Gees drove on, keeping a steady slow speed. The road was wide enough for two cars, and bordered on either side by a low hawthorn hedge set on a sloping bank, about a foot above road level.

One small sports car passed them, and, coming in the opposite direction, an occasional truck rumbled by. Empty ones gave way freely enough, but those with loads swerved off as little as possible in passing.

With one of them, the flies appeared again.

THE truck was from twenty to thirty yards away when Gees saw the small black cloud lift over the hedge to his right and swing like a thrown ball to envelop the truck driver, hiding his head and shoulders in its blackness. The lum-

bering vehicle swerved, drove at the Rolls-Bentley—inescapably, it seemed for long, tensed seconds. Tramping hard on the gas, Gees swung his wheel, and the car shot ahead, its near wheels mounting the bank.

There was a clanging crash and shock, and he stopped with the car at an angle just short of turning turtle, to see the truck also stopped behind him—and his rear mudguard quivering down on the tire, held to the car by no more than two studs.

"All right, Miss Brandon?" he asked cheerfully.

"I—I think so," she answered, her voice very shaky.

"Good! I'll investigate the damage, then."

He got out, and waited until the approaching truck driver stopped facing him. The man's face was ash-white, and he was trembling visibly.

"How many had you had?" Gees asked.

"Not a drop today, I'll take oath, sir," the man answered. "Blinded, I was, sir. I thought it was bees, at first—didn't you see 'em, sir?"

"I saw something," Gees admitted. "License?"

The man produced it. "Ten years clean record!" he said bitterly. "Gorn! And jobs ain't easy, these days. I'm to blame, I know—you got a witness. I ain't. And if I said flies, they'd laff."

"They surely would," Gees said deliberately, and returned the license after glancing at the name and address. "Here, take it, and give me a hand to pull that mudguard clean off so I can put it in the back of the car. I think that's the extent of the damage."

It was, he found when they had pulled the sheet metal clear. A projection on the back of the truck had caught under the mudguard and ripped it away, and, since the wheel was already angled by the slant of the car, it had escaped damage. They laid the bent and crumpled guard down in front of the back seat, and Gees pulled the waterproof cover

over again and buttoned it down. Then he turned to the glooming truck driver.

"They'd laugh," he said. "I don't. Your license stays clean."

"Blimey!" He gasped the ejaculation, and stared incredulously.

"I've met those flies before," Gees explained.

"Gord! D'you mean there's a plague, sir?"

"One pip of a plague, but it's over as far as you are concerned. You won't see any more of them—they don't attack the same man twice. Your truck isn't damaged, I suppose?"

"No, sir." He shook his head. "It takes a lot to damage a six-tonner like that. But you lettin' me off like this, sir—I'll stand the racket if you think I ought. My wheel tracks show who was to blame!"

"Man, you're something new in drivers." Gees laughed, and brought two half-crowns out from his pocket. "Here, I've been so lucky this is just a thank-offering, and I know the blame doesn't rest on either of us two. What made you swerve when the flies hit you, though?"

"I dunno, sir. Didn't know I did. It felt like the wheel was wrung in my hands, somehow. I tried to steer straight, too."

"Oh, well, forget it. And good luck."

"Gord bless you, sir!"

Gees turned back to his car, and saw tears running unchecked down Miss Brandon's cheeks. He leaned toward her, anxiously.

"Shock," he diagnosed. "Would you rather walk to the nearest house, or can you stand being driven till we come to one?"

"Not—not that, altogether," she got out, whisperingly. "You—your utter kindness to that man, when you might have—" She broke off, and got a handkerchief out from her bag to wipe her eyes.

"When I might have batted him on the bezer—yes." He got into the car and took the wheel. "But to tell the honest truth, it didn't occur to me. I know another bezer I badly want to bat."

She laughed, shakily. "Shall we—shall we ever get back?" she asked. "Your—your new way home doesn't seem to work very well."

"Maybe the worst is over," he said. "Maybe, on the other hand, it isn't. So far, you've got to own, we've suffered no personal damage."

He drove on, and the car became level again. "Also," he observed, "I've got another hunch. I believe I've made a discovery. Not a very useful one, at present, apart from its effect on my self-esteem."

"Mr. Green, I think you are the sanest man I've ever met," she said impulsively, with, as he noted, far more steadiness of voice.

"Testimonial filed for production before the lunacy commissioners," he remarked calmly. "If we can find another pub that doesn't look too immoral, what are your views on the subject of tea? Or not?"

"Not, I think, if you don't mind. If—I if I got out, I might not have the courage to get in again today. Don't think me too silly."

"I think you're probably wise. We'll head for home, then."

KEEPING a north-east course by the sun, he struck the main London-Southampton road, and breathed more easily when he saw its width before him. Miss Brandon sat quite still and silent beside him until, having encountered no more flies nor mad ponies, he stopped in Grosvenor Place.

"Handiest for you, I believe," he remarked. "I'm sorry it's been such a lurid day for you. I hoped for peace and barmaid."

"It's been splendid, really," she assured him. "I'm very grateful Mr. Green, and—do we exchange hunches tomorrow?"

"After going through the mail," he answered. "There might be another barmaid case in it, worth investigating. Goodnight, Miss Brandon. Ring me in the morning if you don't feel fit."

"But I shall feel fit, I know. Goodnight, Mr. Green."

Nobody, Gees decided over his coffee and cigarette the next morning, could have behaved better than Eve Madeleine. He knew she had guessed some part of the reason behind those flies and the mad pony, but she had kept her head and made no fuss, even over the most nearly successful attempt at wrecking him. Yes, she had grit, and he congratulated himself again on his choice of a secretary.

So much so, that yet another idea entered his mind as he went along the corridor of the flat to her room, having heard her remove the metal cover from her typewriter after entering. He leaned against the doorpost and watched her slit envelopes with a paper-cutter.

"End of the week, Miss Brandon, pay yourself an additional ten bob, and keep it up from now on. It's the first raise since you began work here, and I wonder you haven't started a mutiny before now."

"But, Mr. Green"—she stopped work on the envelopes to protest—"I'm doing absolutely nothing nearly all the time!"

"Makes no difference," he insisted, "and I can't tolerate insubordination. Raise or the sack—take your choice."

"Well, it's very good of you."

"Yes, isn't it? Unless there's anything that looks special among that lot you have there, leave 'em alone and let's consider our respective hunches of yesterday. Yours for a beginning. What was it?"

She made little stabs with the paper-cutter at the palm of her left hand, nervously. "It was—first, though, I take back all my skepticism about the report you dictated to me the day before. About your view of the man MacMorn, I mean. I don't believe in those things as a rule, but after yesterday—well, I see no alternative."

"And very noble of you, too," he commented. "It amounts to being convinced by what happened yesterday, I take it."

"It amounts to—My hunch"—she paused to consider her words carefully—"amounts to your being in very grave danger, as I see it. For some reason, and I can't tell what it is, somebody wants

you out of the way. Wants you dead, to put it plainly. Tried to kill you."

"MacMorn, you think," he suggested.

"Against that is the fact that you left Brachmornalachan without doing anything against him," she pointed out. "So I don't see—"

"Then my hunch—the first of my two, rather—takes on where yours leaves off," he said, as she did not end her sentence. "I do see—but we'll take my second hunch first. Ever heard of Beelzebub, Miss Brandon? You'll find him described in the New Testament as the prince of devils, I think. I'm not quite sure of the quotation."

"Yes, of course I've read that," she said.

"In reality, Baal-Zebub, one of the Carthaginian Baals or gods—known under that name all over Phoenician civilization, too. The god of corruption—of flies. Does anything occur to your receptive mind?"

"You mean—those flies yesterday?" she asked.

"Remember the report on the case," he urged. "I remember dictating the bit about the black goat, and how MacMorn and I talked about it. Incautiously—I dictated the remark to you—very incautiously, he said—'This soil breeds flies.' That is, the soil inside his circle."

"I think I begin to understand," she said reflectively.

"THE symbol on his gateway stone is undoubtedly that of Koré," he said, "but it looks as if he makes sacrifice to Baal-Zebub. Being able to use flies like that, I mean. Not that my knowing it amounts to anything, except, as I said, it enables me to call myself a clever little feller. And since MacMorn seems determined to take up the flies against me, I feel like taking up the cudgels against him. Full of fight, in fact. It'll cost pounds to put that mudguard back, and I'm annoyed."

"What do you propose to do?" she asked. "What can you do, in fact? As that truck driver said, mention of flies

would merely be sure to raise a laugh."

"Quite so, but it won't be MacMorn who does the laughing," he said grimly. "It's fairly obvious to me that there'll be another move on his part, and soon, too—which brings me to my first hunch, the one that dovetails in on yours. You're quite right about his wanting to eliminate me, and I can see his reason for it too. Quite a good reason."

"Do you propose to tell it to me?" she asked, after waiting awhile.

"Obviously. I said we'd swap, didn't I? Have a cigarette?"

He moved to lean over her desk and offer his case.

"All MacMorn knows is that I went to Brachmornalachan, stayed at The Rowans, and came away again because there was nothing doing at the time. That is to say, I *think* it is all he knows, though after the infernal exhibition at which we had front seats yesterday, I'd hesitate to say quite definitely how much he does know, or how far his information service can reach. I don't believe he can find out anything of what goes on at The Rowans. The four trees cut him off from there."

"Then, you mean, he will not know that you have refused to act for Miss Aylener," she suggested, "but thinks you are merely waiting for some—something to justify you in taking action against him."

"It makes no difference either way, whether I intend to act or no," he said. "That is, as far as MacMorn's obvious actions against me go. From his point of view, the trouble is that I know, and if he carries out any plan against Helen Aylener, I may be able to pin it on him."

"We were both incautious when I had that talk with him. He gave away too much, and so did I. He knows now that I might be dangerous, might turn up evidence against him. Therefore, clear me out of the way before he attempts to transmute Helen's life to his own, to put that plainly."

"But then there is Miss Aylener—the aunt," she objected.

"Her word against his, and a fantastic,

unbelievable accusation, if she makes it," he rejoined. "Be quite assured there will be no trace left of Helen, if he succeeds—except, that is, a wandering shadow like the others. Nothing as evidence of what he has done."

"The man Callum, for one, would confirm Miss Aylener," she urged.

"Callum's evidence—if he had any—would be suspect," he said. "Employed by Miss Aylener, he would naturally side with her. Further, you cannot allege murder, which is what this would be—you cannot allege it unless you produce a body. And there would be no body."

"But there must. What could he do with it?"

"I don't know. I do know that thirteen deaths—sacrifices—went to the erection of every one of the stones in that circle of his, and even after thousands of years there ought to be at least a bone or two. But I'm quite certain there isn't."

"Why, I don't know. What happens at the time of sacrifice, I don't know. One has to be initiate—like MacMorn—to know. Which is to say, one has to hand one's soul over to the object of that altar of his, to whatever it is he serves."

"But if no evidence would be left, why does he want to get rid of you?" she asked. "Surely you are no more danger to him than Callum and Miss Aylener? And he is not trying to remove them."

"MACMORN is afraid of me because he doesn't know the extent of my knowledge," he explained. "He showed it when he warned me away from Brachmornalachan, and now he's thought it over and suspects I may trace Helen Aylener to him—when she goes."

"Probably there is suspicion, unexpressed but there all the same, about the disappearance of Margaret Gralloch some four decades ago, and if another disappearance could be traced to him, it might mean trouble. You see, Margaret Aylener and Callum are there all the time, and probably he knows what to do about them."

"I'm an outsider butting in, an unknown

quantity both as to knowledge and power, and he doesn't know what to do about me—doesn't feel safe. You couldn't trace any of yesterday's happenings to him, any more than you could connect him with my experiences in the fog, the morning I left the place. He'd feel safer if I were inexpensively removed."

"What are you going to do about-it, then?"

"Watch my step, and nothing more, for the present," he answered. "Think the whole thing over, and you'll see there's absolutely nothing in it—nothing but a lot of wild fancies, practically speaking. I had a talk with MacMorn, and he was quite polite, just warned me that places like pre-Druidic circles have uncanny influence over some people. Which is a general belief—the warning is justifiable, a kindness to a stranger.

"I turn out in a fog and very nearly drive into a hole that might have wrecked the car and killed me—more fool me for not waiting till the fog cleared. My tire marks disappear—as they would, on that resilient peat turf. You and I go for a drive and run into a swarm of flies—nothing in that. A forest pony jumps out in front of the car—I believe quite a few of those animals get killed by cars, and cause accidents to motorists.

"Another swarm of flies—I know it's the same swarm, but I'd be a fool to say so—another swarm blots out a truck driver's sight so that he nearly runs me down. What about it? All perfectly natural, and no sign of MacMorn anywhere in it."

"And Helen Aylener, and her aunt?" she asked.

"An eccentric, elderly lady has a phobia about a neighbor of hers, for no reason whatever. A highly-strung girl let her mind dwell too much on the Eleusinian mysteries, whatever they were, and has enough theatricality in her makeup to believe she is in some way connected with them. Delusion due to brooding on them too much, of course.

"Callum, if you want to ask about him,

has a very good and well paid job with Miss Aylener, and expresses belief in her phobia because he doesn't want to lose his place. And there you are!"

"Nothing whatever in it," she observed reflectively.

"Nothing whatever."

She looked at his eyes and smiled at him gently. "And yet you're frightened. Terribly frightened, and I've never seen you afraid before."

Gees crushed out his cigarette. "That's the damnable part of it. There's something about this whole thing that makes me realize I never *have* been afraid before. That I didn't know what fear was until I met Gamel MacMorn. . . ."

CHAPTER XII

THE FIFTH ATTEMPT

ON TWO successive Fridays, Miss Brandon paid herself at her new salary, having done nothing whatever to earn it, since there was nothing to do.

The Rolls-Bentley had been returned, its replaced guard indistinguishable from the others, as far as glossy perfection went. Gees had taken it out twice, once out of boredom and once to drive his father to Cheltenham to visit another old soldier, and the two trips had been eventless.

MacMorn and Brachmornalachan receded to the back of Gees' consciousness; the series of incidents connected with them was closed, evidently, and the shadow of fear was fading out within him.

He left the office on that last Monday in May, and went to his club, the Junior Nomads. Gees found a vacant armchair in the smoking room, ordered a pint of bitter, and surveyed the sporting pages of the *Times*. This club, he decided irritably, was as anti-social as mumps: every Junior Nomad in sight was either gray-headed or bald. Sleepy, beefy, unadventurous. As dull as if being that way was their profession.

Tony Briggs, of the Foreign Office, joined him presently, looking—as usual—like an adventurous tailor's dream. Gees looked up from his paper.

"Y'know, Tony," Gees snarled, "when-
ever I see you in soup and fish like this,
I wonder in what joint the bird is lurking."

"Roberts told me you asked if I were
in," Tony retorted, "but if I'd known you
were in that sort of temper I'd have gone
straight out again after getting my letters.
What's wrong with you?"

"Have a beer," Gees rattled his tankard
on the table beside him, and sundry mem-
bers frowned fiercely while a waiter hur-
ried over. "Repeat this, Henry—and you,
Tony? One like it?"

"Double Haig well splashed, Henry,"
Tony amended. "You dining, Gees, or have
you?"

"I intend to wrap myself round a steak
in an hour or so," Gees answered. "Eating
early is a mistake—it makes a long even-
ing, especially this time of year. What's
going to win the Derby?"

"There's only one horse worth backing,
and he won't win," Tony prophesied. "He
can't, because I've backed him, and that's
fatal."

Gees paid for the drinks and took his
change, and the waiter left them. After
the merest taste at his tankard, Gees put
it down.

"Y'know, Tony, you give tone to the
place, sitting there like that. Did you know
I've been away in the wilds? The far
north?"

"Labrador, or Iceland?" Tony inquired
skeptically.

"Brachmornalachan." He gurgled the
gutturals. "I met Gamel MacMorn, and
Bathsheba Gralloch—and came back."

"Just as well. And do not injure your
tonsils by trying to tell me any more about
it."

"What did you say is going to win the
Derby?"

"It'll either be disqualified or come in
fourth, so I'm not telling you," Tony an-
swered. "Hullo! There's that odd-looking
beggar again!"

Turning his head, Gees too looked out
of the window. "Again?" he asked. "When
did you see him before?"

"Saturday—no, Friday evening, passing

here just as he is now. I was just coming
into the club, and met him face to face.
And he's got what I've never seen before
—absolutely black eyes. He looked full at
me, and I noticed them. All the more be-
cause I realized I'd never seen such a thing
before. Very dark, I've seen, but not ut-
terly and entirely black."

"His name," Gees said gravely, "is
Gamel MacMorn, and he comes from
Brachmornalachan. I met him there."

"I came through Trafalgar Square just
now," Tony said with equal gravity. "Nel-
son climbed down his column and shook
hands with me."

"Do we each tell another before the
next drink, or after?" Gees asked.

"Finish that, and I'll buy you another,"
Tony offered. "But don't tell any more.
I'm going on to one of Lady Benderneck's
small-and-earlies after eating."

GEEES took up his tankard, emptied it
without taking breath, and put it
down again. "I don't see what that has to
do with it," he said. "In all our long and
precious comradeship, Tony, never have
you as good as called me a liar till now.
I feel hurt. Mine is pink gin, a double.
To drown the insult and give me an appe-
tite for dinner."

"Grant that I lied level with you," Tony
begged, and turned to the waiter to give
the order for two more drinks.

"I told the truth."

"I take it back, Gees. If you know him
—well, you know him."

"That's a sight worse! I *do* know him,
and he *is* Gamel MacMorn from Brach-
mornalachan. Coincidences do happen."

"I wouldn't call him so much a coinci-
dence as a—but if he's a friend of **yours**
I won't say it. I'd hate to hurt your feel-
ings."

"He isn't, and you wouldn't," Gees told
him. "Oh, Henry"—he addressed the
waiter, who had returned with their drinks
—"tell the man on the grill to put me on a
large fillet steak and cook it, but not shrivel
it to splintering point. Tell him it's for me
—he'll know, then."

"Very good, sir. Chip potatoes?"

"None whatever. Green peas."

"Very good, sir," and Henry took the money Tony had put down, and went his way. Gees leaned back and looked at the heavy old chandelier pendent from the ceiling, just over his head.

"Junior Nomads," he said, with an inflection of disgust. "And look at that thing! This club ought to be burnt down and rebuilt, Tony."

"Put it in the suggestion book for the committee to consider," Tony retorted. "Or set fire to it yourself."

"You could get double the light out of a modern contraption at half the cost," Gees pursued. "And those glass luster things are no more than a happy hunting ground for flies."

"You need something to occupy your mind, obviously," Tony observed. "Why not close down that fool agency of yours and do some work?"

"Ah! If only you knew, my lad!" He blew smoke up at the offending chandelier, watched it wreath among the lusters.

Tony let the statement pass, and looked at his watch. Gees rose.

"If you're in a hurry, go and eat by all means," Gees advised. "I can't alter the rate of grilling in this place, any more than I can make 'em put these infernal chandeliers on an ash-heap."

"You've got chandeliers on the brain," Tony interrupted.

"Commodious resting place for 'em, in

my case." Gees straightened his length out of his chair and moved over to the window to look out. "But you know those bowl lights, alabaster-looking things—"

A thudding crash and a shout from Tony interrupted him, and he spun about to see the chandelier embedded in the chair in which he had been seated. The leather upholstery was torn in a score of places, the chair itself broken down, and Tony had a handkerchief out to staunch the trickle of blood where a splinter of broken glass had struck his hand.

A smile that was almost a sneer twisted Gees' lips. "I wonder how he did it," he said. "To plagiarize Mark Twain, this sort of thing is getting monotonous, but how the *devil* did he do it!"

"Who did what?" Tony inquired, as two waiters came hurrying.

"Gamel MacMorn of Brachmornalachan chopped it down," Gees said.

"What bee have you got in your bonnet?" Tony inquired caustically.

"Exactly what Helen called it—a bee," Gees said. "Don't mind me, Tony—you don't know the lady, anyhow. But it strikes me, with all we've seen tonight, things are about to happen."

"You're madder than usual," Tony remarked.

"Three—four—the fifth attempt," Gees reflected aloud. "Tony, you're right. I'm so mad that if I could draw a bead on the right target, I should shoot to kill. And maybe I will. Maybe I'll have to. . . ."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

**NO EXTRA COST
FOR VITAMIN A**

(CAROTENE)



**SMITH BROS.
COUGH DROPS**

(BLACK OR MENTHOL—5¢)





A nation's destiny may be moulded in a moment, decided behind the scenes of history. Most of these moments are not chronicled in the annals; some of them, perhaps, never happened at all except in the tickless time of might-have-been. . . . Theodore Roscoe, that assiduous researcher into the possible and the probable, has reconstructed and dramatized some of these Imaginary Moments in the Lives of America's Great. This is the first of a series of stories breathtakingly different and profoundly stirring. We can recommend them to you without reservation.

—The Editors

The Man Who Wouldn't Be King

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Remember Tomorrow," "Mother Damnation," etc.

Perhaps you didn't know that George Washington was offered a crown, that he could have been as unqualifiedly ruler of the United States as George III was of Great Britain. But he refused. No one knows how he made the decision, but it might have gone something like this . . .

I

DID you ever hear about that fiasco in the Caribbean called the "War of Jenkins' Ear?" Do you know who was our wealthiest President? Do you know which President's birthday is celebrated eleven days after he was born; which President accepted no salary while in office; which President was dead for five days before Congress learned about it; which President got into a lot of trouble with the authorities up in Harlem; and the President whose false teeth were exhibited at the Chicago Fair?

Well, the answers to those questions do not concern this story except to illustrate the difference between a historical fact and a story that is apocryphal.

There *was* a War of Jenkins' Ear. Probably you missed it in your schoolbooks, but it happened. 1739 to 1741.

This Jenkins was a sea captain; ran a commercial sailing vessel between Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. England and Spain were squabbling over colonial rights, and one day Jenkins turned up in England with his ear in his hand. Literally.

It was dried and brown as a fig and, dangling from his fingers instead of jutting from his head, it couldn't hear a thing. The British Parliament heard some things, though. Jenkins waved his ear in front of the House of Commons and told them a Spanish sea captain had cut it off over there in the West Indies. If Chamberlain had been prime minister probably Jenkins would have been given

an ear-trumpet and told to make the best of it; but Walpole declared war.

An expedition was recruited in the American Colonies and sent to beat up the Spanish at Cartagena down near Panama.

That's historical fact. So is the fact that Lawrence Washington was a leader of the American-recruited expedition. So is the fact that the Spaniards retired to a fortress at the top of a cliff, and leaned their elbows on the parapets and grinned down at the little American fleet in the bay and waited for the American expeditionary force to die of fever. So is the fact that most of the Americans did.

That Jenkins had really lost his ear in a fight in a British prison, and that the British politicians thought to use the ear as anti-Spanish propaganda, is a story believed by many historians. But it has never been authenticated, never been proved. It is apocryphal.

Now Lawrence Washington had a younger half-brother who wanted to go on the expedition. Had he gone, he might have died of fever with the others. Then he wouldn't have been our wealthiest president. He wouldn't have worked at the hardest job in America for nothing. He wouldn't have been dead five days before the news reached Congress.

His birthday wouldn't have been celebrated, because he wouldn't have lived long enough to be celebrated. His false teeth wouldn't have been on exhibition

at the Chicago Fair, and very possibly there wouldn't have been a Chicago to hold a Fair.

No, had the boy gone down there to help punish the Spaniards for cutting off Jenkins' ear, it is highly probable that his life might have been cut off by yellow fever. Then there wouldn't have been any stories about him, apocryphal or otherwise.

His name was George.

THERE is a story around that when he was a nipper his father had a cherry tree, and—but you know it by heart. You heard it at a party on the twenty-second of February when *you* were a small boy—a party where you ate ice cream and waved a cardboard hatchet. It is a nice story, written by a benevolent old gentleman named Parson Weems, but there is reason to suspect that the parson's enthusiasm for Truth, and his desire to

And the Father of His Country gaped helplessly at that parade of phantoms in the snow



emphasize a Moral for the Young, led him to stretch the subject just a little; therefore the story is apocryphal.

There is another story that Washington threw a dollar across the Delaware. But there is considerable doubt about that, because Washington was always pretty careful of his accounts, and whō'd he be throwing a dollar to, anyway? That is apocryphal, too.

Now then, somebody will say this is an effort to belittle a great national hero. Don't you believe it!

The people who need tin gods for heroes are people who never quite got over their childhood. They don't wish to think of men like Washington and Lincoln as humans like themselves. That would give them inferiority complexes. They'd begin to ask themselves why they, themselves, didn't amount to something important.

No, it's better to think of all great men as more or less gods. You can worship a tin god, but you aren't expected to be one. Of course to be a tin god a man has to be perfect, and when someone is perfect, you don't have to compete because *you* are only human. That lets you out nicely.

Let George do it.

But George Washington wasn't any tin god. He was a human being who had trouble with his dentist, and chilblains at Valley Forge, and arguments with the gardener, and insulting letters from politicians. As a general he lost his share of battles; as a gentleman he liked a good glass of wine and was apt to preen a little in a new suit of clothes; and if there'd been scandal-mongers on the radio in those days, they'd probably have gossiped about him.

It was just this element of humanity that made him the greater man—a tin god doesn't have to rise above a toothache and win debates in Congress when he'd rather sit down on account of his corns—you can't tempt a tin god.

Besides, we're only trying to establish the difference between historical fact and

a story that's apocryphal. Washington fought a losing Revolutionary battle against the British in Harlem—that's fact. But the following story is apocryphal. . . .

II

GEORGE WASHINGTON was pretty tired (a lot more tired than a tin god could ever be) and he was weary and disgusted, too. He'd just had a long ride back to Mount Vernon, and the roads had been bad with wet snow; and his new suit was soaked; and his boots were muddy; and his feet, which had never quite forgotten Valley Forge, were hurting; and he had a lot of things on his mind.

He was hungry, too, and he remembered, as he galloped up to the house, that for some reason or other there was to be a late dinner tonight.

He was a little gruff with the stable boy, and as he stamped into the hall and flung off his wet cape, he wouldn't let Black Tom take the leather saddlebag out of his hand, and sent the rascal off for a bottle of Madiera.

This wet snow might give him a touch of the malaria he'd picked up as a lad in Barbadoes—why the devil had he gone there, anyway?—or anywhere? Times like tonight he wished he had spent his life right here in this pleasant plantation house in Virginia. Man ought to have enough sense to stay home.

Martha came in from the music room, looking beautiful as always; he kissed her rather austere and said he was glad to be back. But he was in a hurry to get upstairs to his room, and expressed the hope that there wouldn't be any guests for dinner.

Martha Washington gave him a frowny little smile, and asked him if he had forgotten what day it was.

"Day? Day? Eh—why, Tuesday, of course. Six days from Philadelphia, and on my word the foulest weather since the New Jersey campaign. Dinner at ten, didn't you say in your letter? I will be

in my room, then. Please instruct the servants I do not wish to be disturbed."

She watched him up the white staircase, smiling and sighing and shaking her head. La! what a man. So many duties to weary him; so much to distract him on his mind. She wondered what important documents of state he had stuffed in that saddlebag, and she hoped he'd have time for a nap before the dinner—such a delight of Southern cooking—was to be served.

"Tuesday, indeed!" said Martha Washington to herself; then gave a little laugh, and hurried into the dining room to count the plates.

George Washington stamped into his room and tossed off his tricorne hat, discarded his damp wig, flung the saddlebag onto his writing table and dropped into a chair before the fireplace, grunting.

He stared a while at the crackling backlog, thinking of next to nothing, hardly aware that Tom had come in with the wine and yanked off his painful boots.

Presently he was bathed and shaved and comfortable in slippers and fresh linen drawers and dressing gown. Tom went out, softly closing the door, and then George Washington took out his false teeth—made of rhinoceros bone, they were, and they hurt like Goshen, and that scoundrelly French dentist in New York had charged an infernal fortune—General Washington took out his teeth and dropped them in a glass of water, and puckered his mouth, and drank a draught of Madeira, and felt better.

In the chair before the fireplace, he closed his eyes and tried to relax. But when he closed his eyes he could see the road unwinding on the underside of his eyelids.

By heaven, he knew every mile of that Philadelphia turnpike—in wet snow, it was vicious—he hoped he'd never have to ride it again. His head was achy and his joints felt stiff, and it was just good to sit there in front of the fire and be home.

No, he wasn't as young as he'd been when he could stand up to his belt in a creek of ice-water, out surveyin'. Nothing like the athlete who'd let the colonials in the French and Indian War (that fool General Braddock!) or the horsemen who'd sat in saddle days at a time, riding all over Hell'an gone trying to find the British.

He stretched his hands to the fire, wiggling a stiff thumb. The wine warmed his stomach, and the fire was a blessing.

It was a charming room of white panels and candle-light—snow fell in white curtains at the window-glass—there was a fragrance of furniture polish and pine cones burning on the hearth. The four-poster bed with its patchwork quilts and eiderdown pillow was like a corner of heaven.

The general shook his head at the bed. It wouldn't do to lie down. Never wake up in time to dress for dinner. Too much to think about, meantime. He consulted the great silver watch he'd left with his teeth on the dresser. Seven-fifteen, and dinner would be, for some reason he couldn't imagine, at ten.

Just two hours and forty-five minutes to think something out. Two hours and forty-five minutes to make the hardest decision in his life. Two hours and forty-five minutes—he eyed the saddlebag pensively—to decide American History.

HE DIDN'T feel like deciding American History, either. As a matter of fact, he was sick and tired of American History. For the last twenty years he'd been up to his neck in the subject, and it seemed as if all the tough decisions had been left up to him.

Not that he minded making decisions. He could take responsibility as well as the next man, and a whole lot better than most. All his life he'd had to make decisions. Sometimes he made them, snap!—sometimes he'd pondered a little too long, as that time when Howe almost trapped him in Harlem and he escaped with the army to White Plains only by

the skin of his teeth (that had been pretty close, remembering he didn't have any teeth). Generally he decided right; and when he made up his mind, he stuck to his guns.

Yes, all his life they'd said, "Let George do it." And he'd done it. Willingly. For his country. Yet, the minute he'd done it, they'd begun to criticize.

Take the army. They'd asked him to be General-in-chief. John Adams had asked him personally. They'd given him a vote of confidence. The Continental Congress had commissioned him.

Minute he accepted the command; they'd started to jump on him. The New Englanders wanted him to defend Boston. The Virginians wanted him to bring the troops to Virginia. Maybe he'd made a mistake about the strategic importance of the Hudson River—he knew, now, he should've had more cavalry and less artillery—he shouldn't have wasted a lot of time trying to defend New York City—but hindsight was always easier than foresight, and he'd had to fight the British somewhere.

He'd fought 'em, too. Beat 'em, finally. But he could've done it a lot quicker, maybe, if there hadn't been too many cooks with their spoons in the broth.

Take the government. They'd elected him President by unanimous vote. "Let George do it," they'd said again. And now it was worse than the army had been—they asked him to make the decisions, and when he made them he was in hotter water than ever.

John Adams was jealous of him, and Jefferson tried to scotch half the things he did. He appointed a cabinet, and five hundred people wrote to tell him the appointments were wrong.

Hamilton couldn't get along with Jefferson, Henry Knox sided with Hamilton, Randolph sided with Jefferson—a cabinet meeting became an endless wrangle—Congress argued like a bunch of sparrows—the public carped, whichever side won; and whatever happened, he was going to get the blame.

He didn't mind blame—it was part of the responsibility—he had to expect it, the same as he had to take snubs from his old friend George Mason, and those scurrilous writings of Thomas Paine who wrote that open letter that said the administration was deceitful and perfidious, practically accused the President of fraud.

And there was that whipper-snapper grandson of Ben Franklin's who wrote those editorials calling him treacherous and inefficient. And that pamphlet by William Duane—he could see it in his mind's eye now—claiming that if Braddock had promoted him during the French and Indian War, he, Washington, would have fought with the British instead of against them in 1776.

WHY the devil did people elect a man President, and then, as soon as he took office, begin to slander him? Why, if he wanted to pin down these slanderers, he'd be in the law courts for the next two thousand years.

They accused him of manipulating the bank, of grafting in real estate, of double-dealing in trade. Even his personal life was under fire from their miserable tongues. They said he maltreated his slaves—that he'd married money—that he was parsimonious with his poor old mother.

This vicious campaign of whispering was worse than the British propaganda at the start of the War when the Tories forged those love letters calculated to ruin his reputation.

George Washington got all worked up, thinking about the slanders he'd been subjected to. (This story is fiction, but those slanders are historical fact). But the main thing that bothered him was that he couldn't get things done. They'd said, "Let George do it." They'd elected him President to do it. But now they seemed determined not to let him do anything. They asked him to make the decisions. All right. He decided.

Then nothing was done.

And so many things in this big, new, sprawling, turbulent, unformed, wilder-

ness-bordered country needed doing. The roads had to be fixed, new turnpikes built. The frontier needed forts. The Indians had to be handled. There ought to be a good sound banking system, and a regular army, and a system for distributing the mails.

The courts ought to be better established; there ought to be a sounder enforcement of Law; the States should quit bickering and get together; some kind of tariff should protect American goods. Taxes had to be collected regularly and levied with fairness, so there couldn't be any more Whisky Rebellions like the row in Pennsylvania.

The veterans had to be decently compensated to keep quiet such rascals as that malcontent Shays, up in Boston. There was the merchant marine to be built up; there ought to be a navy to do something about those pirates in the West Indies and Mediterranean; foresighted men should plan inland canals.

The European situation was ticklish as anything, and American dangerously located what with the colonies of France, Spain and England surrounding the Thirteen States on all sides. The Dutch and French loans had to be somehow paid back. Somebody had to do something about these highwaymen roaming the American roads; about building a new capitol, preferably on the Potomac; about the politics of Rhode Island; about cementing the people into a solid country, a real nation. And sooner or later someone would have to settle the tragic problem of the slaves.

AND Congress bickered. Congress haggled. Congress debated and side-stepped and stalled. All these things that needed doing were urgent as the devil, and Congress sat around that draughty hall in Philadelphia and argued and harangued and fiddled as if there was all the time in creation.

There wasn't any time to lose. On the frontier the Indians were raising hob. Foreign creditors were pressing for pay-

ments. America was on the verge of bankruptcy. The international situation was a powder keg. The new little Union was as shaky as an eaglet in a nest on the edge of a cliff, and just at a time when all good Americans should be pulling together, the government was at sixes and sevens.

You tried to push through a bill to stabilize the currency, and it was blocked by some shortsighted fellow like James Madison. You asked for a canal in Pennsylvania, and the delegates from Massachusetts voted it down because they wanted a canal there first.

Important bills were shelved by pettifogging argufiers. Issues were lost under clouds of rancorous words.

Each politician had his own axe to grind; personal passions ran riot over things that should have been accomplished for the general good; the people cried for this and that in a million demanding voices—everybody in America wanted something in a hurry—and everywhere there were cross-purposes, quarrels, delays.

George Washington muttered an oath, glaring at the fire.

It wasn't that all those fellows were grafters or selfish demagogues, either. Nobody could say Jefferson and Madison and Adams weren't sincere. Nobody could doubt their honesty and patriotism. Congress was an honor roll of patriots—hardly a man who hadn't risked his life and fortune in defiance of British rule. Why, some day those men would be named in history books as the heroes of the American Revolution. Their signatures were on the Declaration of Independence; they had framed the Constitution.

And now?

And now, having licked the British, they were fighting among themselves. Having freed American from tyranny, they didn't know what to do with it; they couldn't get together on how to run it; each wanted the nation built to his own specifications. They were like a thousand carpenters working desperately to erect a house on a thousand different plans

—knocking each other off the scaffolds—squabbling about the foundations—stopping to argue on the ladders.

Some wanted a house of brick; others demanded lumber and plaster. One wall was made of pine, another of limestone; the roof hung unsupported; workmen ran about in all different directions; the voices rose like those about the Tower of Babel—and like the Tower of Babel, the edifice threatened to tumble down.

"A house," George Washington thought grimly, "divided against itself cannot stand."

They'd elected him foreman—made him overseer—but they wouldn't agree to his plans. America, Land of Liberty—this fine new house!—it ought to be built of granite, instead of jerrybuilt on sand.

George Washington told himself he was sick to death of all the argufying, wrangling and delays. He wanted to see America built; wanted to get things done. Think of what would've happened to his plantation if he'd run it as these muddlers and inefficient fiddlers were running the Union. Think of what would've happened during the War, if every move he made had been argued over, delayed and shelved.

General Washington stood stiffly to his feet. He had an hour and a half to make up his mind. It was probably the biggest decision he'd ever had to make. Stalking to his writing desk, he opened the weather-stained saddle-bag; fished out a letter.

General—the letter said—We want you to wear this. You Know Who.

Washington tightened his lips. That colonel in the veteran's Society of the Cincinnati was a reckless chap, but—

"There's no harm in looking at it, by gad!"

George Washington reached into the saddlebag and took out a parcel wrapped up like six pounds of sausage. He looked hastily around his room; made sure the door was latched.

Then he unwrapped the parcel and held up in the candlelight something that flashed and shone and glittered in his

hands like a chunk cut out of the sun. It was a crown—a golden, gem-encrusted crown!

III

WELL, you can't blame George Washington for indulging in a gasp of admiration. He liked fine things, and that crown was a beauty. It was as big and round as a Christmas pudding, and as heavy as lead; the golden brim shone like fresh butter; it was lined with fine blue velvet, and the top was all sprinkled over with emeralds, pearls, rubies and diamonds thick as candies in a cake.

In the candlelight the gems sparkled and twinkled and blazed in George Washington's eyes. My, what a flare! At the peak of the crown there was a Maltese cross like the decoration on the dome of a palace—a gadget of blazing jewels that took George Washington's breath away.

The General's hands began to tremble just as yours or mine would tremble at holding such a fabulous present. Maybe a little more, for if you or I were presented with a crown, we'd know it was a dream, but George Washington knew that crown in his hands was real.

There'd been considerable talk of it in certain quarters. At the Inauguration in New York City a number of people had called him "Highness", and it was not uncommon for countryfolk and backwoodsmen and people at roadside inns to address him as "Your Majesty."

Those facts ran through George Washington's mind (they really happened, although this story didn't) as he stood there blinking at the marvelous treasure he had unwrapped.

You can see him turning that crown from side to side; perhaps counting the jewels (for he was always a careful man); weighing the thing in his hand.

As he turned it in his fingers, the gems flashed and sparkled and sent sprinkles of colored light around the charming colonial bedroom. There were two or three

dozen rubies, and a couple of hundred pearls, and forty-eight emeralds, and eighty-six diamonds in that bauble on the peak. George Washington guessed it weighed about sixty pounds, which was thirty pounds up on the crown of the Czar of Russia; and he judged its value on the jewel market at about a quarter of a million dollars.

He forgot that his gums were aching and the plaguey crick in his thumb; and he said "Ha!" and "Ah!", as what man wouldn't?

Sixty pounds in gold and a quarter million dollars in gems was a lot of money, and all Americans had a hankering for money (ask any European), even George Washington. He was fond of good clothes and expensive adornment, and that crown was the most expensive piece of adornment that had ever been in the States. In fact, there'd never been anything like it in America before.

Next thing he knew, the General had that crown on his head. That's nothing—you do the same when somebody gives you a new hat. Try it on. George Washington wasn't so much different from us ordinary Americans. He wanted to see if that thing fit his head.

And it fit him fine.

It might have been made at the goldsmith's to his measure. It was comfortable, too. The gems shimmered in all the colors of the rainbow, and the gold filigree blazed like a bonfire. Standing before the mirror of his dressing table, George Washington had to admit it was macaroni. That doesn't mean Italian macaroni; it's early American slang from the days of *Yankee Doodle*, and it means pretty swell.

George Washington couldn't help thinking that that crown on his head looked pretty swell.

No sir, he just had to preen a little. That dazzling, velvet-lined caubeen of gold and flashing gems was a mighty fine article of headgear. Even in his bathrobe and linen drawers, and with his teeth out, George Washington cut a figure. He was six-foot-two in his stocking feet—chin high

above the crowd at any time—and that bonanza on his head set him up tremendously.

"By Gad, sir, that *is* a crown!"

You bet it was. The General struck an attitude, and that headpiece made him seem about ten feet tall.

He wheeled sideways to get a focus on himself in profile. Then he worked up one of the postures that Gilbert Stuart had liked to paint him in—hand in bosom—features thoughtfully stern—and with that crown aloft, his portrait in the mirror was devilish important and impressive.

It looked even better when he snapped in his spring-hinged teeth and pinned on a fresh linen jabot and thrust his hand under the jabot.

Wheeling and posing before the mirror, he caught his picture at all angles, and the more he saw of himself in that crown, the better he fancied the picture. He tried it at a slant; he tried it square on his head with the brim down about his ears; he adjusted it this way and that, giving it a jaunty tap the way a modern Brummel taps his topper. No matter how he wore it, it looked macaroni.

He thought of the other headpieces he had worn—the coonskin cap when he'd been a surveyor—the flatbrim he'd worn when he courted Martha Custis—the General's hat with its red-white-and-blue cockade—the sweat-stained tricorne he wore as President. This crown was certainly an advance in headgear. He wondered what the boys in his lodge would think if he walked in wearing it. If the men of his old regiment could see him now! Jehu, what Gilbert Stuart couldn't do with a blazer like this!

And Jefferson. John Adams. Madison. He could just imagine their eyes.

He couldn't accept it, of course. . . .

Still, they were offering it to him; there were those who wanted him to wear it. All those veteran officers in the Society of the Cincinnati who wanted to establish a nobility, and that camarilla that felt a monarchy was the only way to get things done.

YOU can see George Washington weighing that crown in his mind. It's hard to know exactly what he thought, but you can bet that under the circumstances he began to think about that dilatory, long-winded batch of bickerers in Congress. About the endless wrangles between Jefferson and Hamilton in his cabinet. About the stupidity and general incompetence of the voting public. About the country's crying need for action, and the government all at sevens and sixes; all the urgent things that ought to be done quickly and weren't being done at all.

He began to wonder about Democracy.

Do you think George Washington didn't have his doubts about Democracy? Remember, it had never been really tried before; it was a brand new formula for running a country, and from the first there'd been plenty of patriots who thought it wouldn't work.

Nobody in Europe believed it was going to pan out, and all the monarchies sat around sneering behind their hands, waiting for the little Republic to collapse, ready to jump on America like a pack of hungry wolves. George Washington wanted his country to be free of Europe. But to be free you had to be strong. To be strong you had to have a unified nation, a strong government.

But how strong should the government be; how much freedom should the people have? Could you ever have a government when men sat around bickering under the Liberty Bell all day long and never got anything done?

George Washington's thoughts probably went like that, and you can see him beginning to pace.

It was a tough problem, this problem of Democracy—men's minds had been struggling with it for five thousand years. George Washington had to decide it in an hour, and you can see the muscles wrestling on his forehead. Did the people know enough to run a Republic? Would they have ever enough education? Would politicians ever bury their personal axes for

the common good? Certainly Congress wasn't getting anywhere.

Gad! all a monarch had to do was flourish a scepter, and the job was under way.

Think of all the roads you could build, the canals you could dig, the forts you could put up, the treaties you could order drawn? Wouldn't it put an end to delays, arguments, shilly-shallying? A king didn't have to take back-talk. You ordered the currency stabilized, and it was stabilized. If you wanted to fire your Secretary of State, you merely said, "You're fired!"

Congress would jump when you spoke from a throne. Everybody would jump. These sovereigns in Europe got action. Ha! and wouldn't those triple-tongued diplomats and sly ambassadors look up! How the public would look up, too! By heaven! it would put an end to those slanderous editorials and scurrilous politicians' lies. It would put an end to crooked elections and the dangers of being ruled by a rabble.

Think of the efficiency! Think of the advantages, the absolute law and order! Think of what you could accomplish! An autocratic state—that was the way to get action in a country. And Martha—!

WHY, Martha would be a queen! Those society gadabouts like Mrs. Bingham would have to take a back seat, then. Imagine Martha on the throne at his side in a robe of ermine with a diamond coronet! And he would be king—first ruler of America!—founder of a dynasty!—monarch of all he had surveyed! A king, by heaven! One of the great, historical figures of the world's history!

Talk about the chance of a lifetime! Well, without quite knowing how he did it, there was George Washington standing in front of that mirror with a satin bed quilt wrapped around him for a robe, a silver candlestick for a scepter in his hand, and that great crown blazing on his head—sovereign for the history books—a monarch for America—a king if you ever saw one!

And in just another tick the whole history of our country might have been different—for when George Washington made a decision, he made a decision—if something hadn't happened; something that isn't in your history book, either.

There was George posed for portrait of a king in front of that mirror. There was Martha downstairs, perhaps making candy. The whole house was quiet with that hush of a stately mansion enveloped in a flaky snowstorm. And then, clear and penetrating, from the night outside and right under the bedroom window, there sounded a low, eerie whistle.

IV

THERE was something furtive about that whistle—something signally and furtive, like a redskin imitating a bird-call—and George Washington, who hadn't forgotten his woodsmanship, got over to that window in a hurry.

He snuffed out the candles on the way, and he ducked up to the sill and pulled aside the curtains an inch, and peeped out and down, his body pulled back from the window frame so anyone on the ground below couldn't see him.

There was someone down there, too.

What with the darkness and the-drifty snowfall, it was hard to see, but a haze of yellow candlelight came from the window of the dining room down below, and there was a blurred, snow-powdered figure moving along the side of the house like a shadow. As the General glared down, the figure turned and beckoned toward someone following from around near the front veranda.

Again there sounded that furtive, signally whistle-call.

George Washington said, "By God!" He didn't often permit himself to swear, but that prowler down there under his bedroom window took him back to his old Indian-fighting days.

He reached to the table behind him and found his silver-handled horsepistol, and gritted his teeth while he drew a bead on

the shadowy figure down beneath. There hadn't been any redskin raiders in this part of Virginia for a hundred years, but you never could tell about those savages.

That skulker down there was an Indian, certainly. Its blanket was pulled up over its head, and it was sneaking along in a way to curl your periwig. There were others behind it, too. Somewhere out on the road.

George Washington could hear a ghostly stomping of horses; a muted murmur of voices muffled by night and snow.

Tensely the General took aim; the creeping figure was almost under the window; George Washington's finger tightened on the trigger. And then, as that prowler down below sneaked into the wash of light which came mellow from the dining room, George Washington froze.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

It wasn't an Indian. Listen! Just as that footpad came into the patch of window-light, it paused to lower the blanket and peer around; and George Washington found himself looking down at a man's bald head.

The only bald-headed Indians he'd ever seen before were scalped Indians, and that man down there in the snow was not a redskin. What George Washington had mistaken for a blanket was a robe—a robe as white as a bedsheet. The General's face went even whiter, for he recognized the style of that robe, and it wasn't a bedsheet, either, but a Roman toga!

Yes, sir, that figure down there at the side of the house wore a Roman toga. And that wasn't all.

It made a step forward, and George Washington caught a glimpse of what looked like Latin sandals. There was a wreath of laurel leaves circling that bald head. Up there in his bedroom George Washington like to've fallen down. That figure down below pulled the toga up over its head to shield its bald-spot from the snow; covered its face with an arm, and went sneaking off into the darkness toward the mansion's rear.

As it passed out of sight, there was a

cry of wind under the eaves, and that wintry breath seemed to come through the upper window and go right through George Washington. Following that retreating figure with his eyes, George Washington had seen the dark crimson blood-stain on its back. Whew! that toga was splashed all with red between the shoulder-blades. George Washington didn't have to consult his schoolbooks to remember who that figure was!

"Great Caesar's ghost!"

THE General darn near swallowed his teeth as he gulped that out. Julius Caesar! Surely he must've been dreaming. Nobody was going to tell him he'd seen an emperor from ancient Rome down there under his bedroom window. Julius Caesar, who was assassinated in 44 B.C.! Julius Caesar in Mount Vernon, Virginia, prowling around an American colonial mansion at ten o'clock at night in a snowstorm!

George Washington steadied himself at the window frame and passed a hand across his forehead. It must have been the wine. The room was too warm, and he'd had a spot too much of Madeira.

That had to be it.

But just as he'd satisfied himself about that, he glimpsed another figure coming. It was moving up from around the front veranda, skirting the snow-wigged shrubs and scouting along the side of the house in the tracks of that first apparition.

George Washington froze behind the curtains, and the horse pistol shook in his hand.

Another spook. A great, fat-bellied one that came thefting along on tiptoe, holding up the skirts of its robe to keep clear of the drifts. Another Roman! Snow gusted around the creature's head, and George Washington only had a glimpse of the face.

But he knew that painted, distorted countenance with its high-bridged nose and flabby red lips. The thing was carrying a violin, too—an old fiddle clutched under one elbow. Gripped in one fist was a big, crimson butcher-knife—the knife

with which the monster had slashed his own throat.

George Washington gasped, "*Nero!*"

He couldn't believe his eyes. The creature melted off in the darkness and snowflakes, there and gone like an evil thought. George Washington grabbed himself by the forehead, and wondered if he were having hallucinations. The ghosts of Julius Caesar and Nero wandering around Virginia?

The General yanked aside the curtains of his bedroom window, scrubbed away a little patch of frost from the pane, and glared down at the snowy ground dimlit by the glow from the dining-room. Ghosts? By heaven! there was no one down there now. The General knew he had imagined those phantoms. George Washington was a modern American, and he didn't believe in ghosts.

"Great Scott—!"

Even as he scorned the previous spec-ters, why, there was a third. Coming along the side of the house, catfoot like the first two. A great, rangy shadow wrapped in animal skins—at first, the General thought it was a wild beast walking upright—a horrible apparition with a a tangled yellow beard and a great blowing mane of yellow hair. It carried a long spear, and fended the snow from its face with a bear-skin shield; around its waist there dangled a circlet of human skulls.

"Attila!" George Washington groaned, recalling a woodcut in a schoolbook. "*Attila the Hun!*"

You can wager the General thought he was seeing things when he saw that mediaeval barbarian pass through the faint haze of light that bathed through the frosty panes of the dining-room. Attila melted off in the snow gusts on the heels of Nero and Julius Caesar, and the wintry wind whistled across the sills of the bedroom window, and George Washington had a chill worse than anything at Valley Forge.

"I've got a fever!" he told himself. "I'm having delusions from the chills and fever!"

HE OPENED his mouth to call Martha, and then he closed it with a snap. His teeth were clattering so hard he had to hold them in his jaws with one hand and grip the window-sill to support his legs with the other. Down there in that lighted patch where Attila had been, there was standing a knight in armor! Word of honor! a dark figure in chain mail. It carried a battle-axe in the crook of its elbow the way a dandy might carry a walking stick. Its helmet was weighted with snow, and the visor was pulled down, but George Washington thought he could identify the device emblazoned in the warrior's cape.

"God save me! *William the Conqueror!*"

He wanted to yell down at that phantom below and tell it to return to Hell, but he couldn't utter a sound out of his choking throat.

He could hear, though. The night was so still he could hear the patter of snowflakes soft as feathers against the window, and he could've sworn he heard the Conqueror's chain mail jingle as he beckoned at someone out by the road, then vanished off in the snowy dark at the mansion's rear.

The goose pimples were out on the General's skin by this time; he was sure he had gone mad and was suffering mental delusions. The Conqueror, Attila the Hun, Nero and Julius Caesar. Why, it was just as impossible as if you looked out of your bedroom window some wintry night and saw, prowling down there in the snow, George Washington.

The General rushed across his darkened bedroom to his cabinet—stubbing his toe as he did so, and saying words quite off the Presidential record, you may well believe—and pored himself a good stiff jigger of whiskey. Then he was back at the window like a shot, because he knew that corn, distilled at his own supervision, was the sort of vanilla that cleaned the cobwebs right out of your belfry.

"Ye gods and little fishes!"

Instead of clearing his head, that jolt

seemed to have made it worse. There were two wraiths down there under the window now. Advancing out of shadow, arm and arm into the faint, frosted candlelight, hobnobbing together like a pair of bosom friends. They moved on through the snowflakes, and George Washington could have fallen out over that upper sill.

"*Rufus the Red and Richard the Second!*"

There was no mistaking the pair. That rascally, red-faced devil who had misruled England and so got himself murdered in the Year 1100. And that weakly, pompous young Richard who had betrayed the Irish and was assassinated in Pontefract Castle in 1400 A.D.

They paced by slowly, bright birds in their gaudy velvet robes, royal plumes hanging bedraggled on their heavy-bowed heads. George Washington could even hear the murmur of their voices, but he couldn't catch what they were saying, and they had faded off into the night before he could yell down at them to ask.

And then, like the snow, the others came thick and fast. The Henrys, the Edwards, King John. They crept by under the window in the snow-flurries, and melted off into the dark like shades.

As if from the Netherworld they came with their scepters, their coronets, their tarnished coats-of-arms. That wicked Henry who had blinded his brother with hot irons. Henry VI, whose machinations plunged England into a dozen wars, the blood of murder on his cruel face. Edward II, stooped and hobbling, his crown tilted drunkenly, frame crippled by imprisonment and the rack, his breast stained scarlet by the assassin's knife. Charles I, opinionated, arbitrary — that scheming Charles who lost his head in 1649 to the Regicides.

There was James III of Scotland, another murder victim, followed by his unhappy descendant James V. After that George Washington couldn't say how many there were or who.

They kept on coming, blurred phantoms in the snowfall.

He recognized the bloated, besotted, benighted behemoth Henry VIII, swaggering in his court dress, with the blood of his beheaded wives making red gloves of his hands. That murderer King of Denmark was there, and Juan of Portugal, and one of the Philips of Spain, and Ivan the Terrible, clad in red and black, and along toward the last Mad Czar Paul, drooling and grimacing with the strangler's cord still about his neck.

They came around from the dark of the front veranda and stole along the side of the house and melted out of sight at the rear, a gorgeous-robed, gem-bedecked line of phantoms—as if, on this night, all the haunts of history were passing in review before George Washington.

ALL of them were there—all the red-handed conquerors and iron-heeled tyrants—the instigators of persecution; the oppressors of the people—the dissolute, depraved, degenerate, decapitated monarchs and sovereigns and kings and warlords who had misruled Europe and held their countries in bondage and misery for the past thousand years, and so been forced to abdicate, or had been poisoned, stabbed or beheaded for their wickedness.

Had George Washington seen that review today there might have been added some interesting specimens to that procession—a little Frenchman in cutaway and cavalry boots with his hand thrust into his bosom—a Czar whose beard made him look kindlier than he was—an emperor with fierce moustachios and a German eagle on his knob.

And had he seen that review tomorrow, he might have beheld a couple more—if you've read the papers lately, you can guess who.

But this story took place about a hundred and fifty years ago—it was a miserable enough review as it was—those figures passed under George Washington's eyes like the dreads and warnings of conscience, and they made George Washington sick.

And the last ghost he saw on that wintry

night was a mincing little figure all in velvet, lace and silk—a horrid, soul-curdling specter not so long-dead as the others, and it was carrying its head under its arm. At least, that was how it appeared to George Washington, looking down from his upper window. Maybe the collar of its princely greatcoat was pulled up high to hide face and ears. Maybe what looked like a headless neck was a wig covered with snow. But it didn't seem to have any noggin save the one it carried under its arm like a cabbage—George Washington could glimpse the face on the wretched thing—a sulky, hooked-nose face, doll-like with its shawl of feminine curls—the General knew whose head *that* was. Why, only a few months ago he'd read about it going to the guillotine.

"Louis the Sixteenth!"

That was too much for the General. Louis XVI creeping around the house with his head under his arm! Those other apparitions had chilled him to the marrow, but the scepter of this miserable king whose decapitation was still featured in the news from Europe sent the temperature to zero in George Washington's soul.

His heart was thumping like a gilet in an icebox. His pores were faucets gushing hot and cold running water. He had the megrims. He doubted every one of his senses.

That parade under his window had been a nightmare—a fevered imagination—an illusion of shadows and window-light and blowing snow. Yet he could have sworn those phantoms had had body and voice; he might have imagined one or two of them, but his brain could not have conjured a wicked score.

Hallucinations? Ghosts? There was only one way of finding out, and always the General was a man of action. There has never been a doubt as to George Washington's bravery; surely he proved his courage *that* night.

With one leap he reached his famous sword, and with another he reached the door. The house was as quiet as anything—the servants and Martha must have all

been in the kitchen—his bedroom slippers flying down the staircase didn't make a sound.

The grandfather clock ticked loud in the stillness of the hall, and the General went out of the front door like a gust of wind. He crossed the dark veranda in two bounds. In the icy blackness of the road he couldn't see a thing, and he dived through the snowy shrubbery and raced around the corner of the mansion, his breath puffing clouds of white vapor like steam from one of James Watts' inventions.

V

OUT there in the night and wind he was half blinded; the snow swirled around him in white flurries; the wet flakes clung to his lashes; the cold went through him like the breath of Norway.

The sword was freezing in his right hand as the pistol had frozen in his left; at the same time he was sweating like a horse. As he stole along the side of the house, his eye on that haze of candle-glow drifting from the dining-room window, he was scared as he'd never been in his life.

That's when you're brave—when you go out in the dark after something, in spite of being scared half to death—George Washington had to call on every ounce of his courage to get himself along the side of that house.

All the scepters from Tophet seemed to be there at Mount Vernon, Virginia. He'd seen them out there in the snow flurries and wind howl; the night came around him like an icy menace; but George Washington was the kind of man who didn't believe anything until he'd had proof, and he went out scouting for proof of those ghosts just as he determinedly as if they'd been nothing more than savage Indians.

He went straight toward that lighted area where he'd seen them. And all the time George Washington knew there couldn't have been any such thing, because it was the Age of Reason, and ghosts and spooks and haunts had been banished

along with superstition and witchcraft and all that other stuff by the Age of Reason.

Why, that was part of the Revolution—the effort to free men's minds from the bondage of that sort of rubbish.

And then George Washington got probably the worst shock a man ever had. He'd just screwed up the last of his courage with logic and reason when he arrived under that lighted window. Then all the terrors of the world's dark past came down *bang!*

There were the tracks!

Yes, sir, there before him, clearly revealed by the mellow light from the dining-room, were the footprints. Plain as anything in the snow. Tracks of sandals, princely slippers and square-toed Cavalier boots. Iron heels and courtier shoes.

The General knew foot-tracks when he saw them, and those prints left deep in the snow weren't any hallucination. The eyes just about jumped out of George Washington's head. It wasn't any time to argue logic and reason.

A black wind moaned around the house, bringing a whirl of spookish flakes, and the General turned about and ran. It wasn't the first time he'd had to do some running, but that time he'd pulled out ahead of Lord Howe in Brooklyn, and some of those races he'd run in New Jersey were nothing to the dash he made that night in Mount Vernon to get back into the house.

You can't call it cowardice, either.

You'd have run yourself if you thought Caesar's Ghost was on your heels. Add Nero and Attila the Hun and William the Conqueror and Ivan the Terrible and Henry the VIII and Mad Czar Paul and all those other hoodoos with Louis XVI with his head under his arm bringing up the rear, and you'd have probably beat George Washington.

He was back inside the house in nothing flat, and he slammed the door after him, *bang!* and bolted it, too. As he flew across the hall, he yelled, "Martha! Martha!" but his throat only let out a squeak.

YOU many think it funny—George Washington racing upstairs to his room like that—but before you feel too superior (you who live in a day of electric lights and radio and gasoline and talking pictures) just remember all the superstitions still alive today.

George Washington blew into his room like a blizzard, and he threw fifteen pieces of wood on the fire, and had all the candles lighted before you could say Jack Sprat. The room was fairly ablaze with lights when he heard a step in the doorway behind him, and he spun with a gasp, clutching saber and pistol, expecting to face heaven knew what.

But it was only Martha Washington in her ribbon-laced cap — Martha, pink-cheeked and smiling in a charming party dress, quaint and pretty as a picture. She blinked in the light-blaze for an uncomprehending minute; then her eyes on her husband widened, startled; she stepped in quickly and closed the door.

"George Washington," she demanded, "what in the world is going on? Why, you're covered with snow—wet from head to foot! You've been out of the house! And in your bedroom slippers! You take off those wet things this minute, George Washington! Look at you—pale as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Madam," said the General, and he was shaking so he could hardly talk, "Madam, I have seen a ghost: A whole parade of ghosts. On my word of honor! Right there under our bedroom window, and they left their footprints in the snow!"

"Footprints in the snow? From ghosts?" Martha Washington raised her hands as in despair. "I declare, George Washington, if I didn't hear this from you, I would never believe—"

"Nor did I!" he panted desperately. "Not till I saw their tracks! Imagination doesn't leave tracks in the snow, I tell you, and the prints are there. I saw them, Martha! All of them! Julius Caesar! Nero! Attila! William the Conqueror! Rufus the Red was with them, and Edward the Second, and Charles the First, and Henry the

Eighth. Yes, and that mad Czar of Russia who was strangled with a cord, and a lot of others, and poor wretched Louis of France with his head under his arm was last—I swear it, Martha!—Louis the Sixteenth!—carrying his head—under his arm—!"

He broke off for air, and Martha Washington looked at him in unbelief.

"George Washington," she said, "I do think sometimes there never was such a man! Caesar's ghost! The phantom of Czar Paul! Louis Sixteenth with his head under his arm! Why, those weren't ghosts, you silly goose. They're friends of yours."

"Just friends dressed up in masquerade —Aleck Hamilton and Sam Adams and Tobias Lear and some of the others—and that Louis you saw was only Doctor Craik, and that head was the false-face for his costume. That's who you saw, only your friends made up in costume, and they came here for the party."

"Party?" George Washington blurted. "What party?"

Martha's eyes were blinking as if she wanted to cry. "Your party, George—not a political party! A masquerade ball, and I so much wanted to surprise you! I told them all to leave their carriages at a place down the road, and asked them to enter quietly by the back door!" And as he still appeared baffled and in confusion, she clamped her hands in dismay. "Heavens to Betsy! George, haven't you yet remembered? Have you still forgotten the day?"

"Day? Day?" the General muttered, just as he had when she'd asked the question early in the evening. "Why, it's the twenty-second of February, but—"

"It's your *birthday*!" Martha cried. "Are all the matters of State so heavy on your mind, poor man, that you can't even remember your own birthday?"

THE General shook his head mournfully, and allowed he'd quite forgotten. It was that New Style calendar, he said—that Gregorian calendar that Eng-

land had adopted in 1752. He was always getting fuddled about dates, he admitted, and he'd never quite got used to the change in calendars. Always thought of his birthday as February the eleventh, as it had been in the Old Style calendar.

Well, that explained to Martha why George Washington had forgotten his birthday, but in consequence there was another look of startlement on Martha's face.

"But if you've forgotten it was your birthday," she cried, "what are *you* doing, all made up as for masquerade? What?"—she pointed—"is that thing you're wearing on your head?"

George Washington looked at himself in the mirror, and pulled a gasp.

There he was, still wrapped up in that satin bed-quilt with that dazzling crown a-topper, only he didn't look very regal now. The bed-quilt was soaked and muddy, and the crown was askew about his ears with the brim slanted over one eye. To George Washington, right then, it didn't look at all macaroni.

"Madam," he faced his wife, for he couldn't begin to tell a lie at this age, "Madam, it's a kind of crown. Some of the boys in the Cincinnati sent it over, and I—well, there was no harm in trying it on."

"You take it right off," Martha ordered, "and you put on some good dry American clothes and come downstairs."

She was frowning and shaking her head in exasperation as she backed from the room, and as she closed the door the General heard her murmuring there was no accounting for men's whims.

And that's about all there is to this story.

Some say that George Washington took that crown and threw it out of the window into a snowbank, and it sank into the mud in the Spring thaw and was buried in the good earth of Mount Vernon.

Another version has it that the General flung it into the fireplace and watched it melt. The fire was mighty hot from all the wood he'd put on, and that crown melted like it was made of butter. Even the gems dissolved, and the General felt a little cynical. They might have done better than glass diamonds and so much gilded lead.

At any rate, that crown was never seen on George Washington's head.

It didn't suit the head of an American, and the General had had his history lesson on crowns.

Pausing at his bedroom window he looked down at the foot-tracked snow. What a scare those historical figures had given him. "Sweet Land of Liberty!" he exclaimed.

Then he adjusted his starched linen jabot, and went down to his birthday party.

* * *

Of course all that is apocryphal, which means it's fiction and never happened. Not that it's impossible.

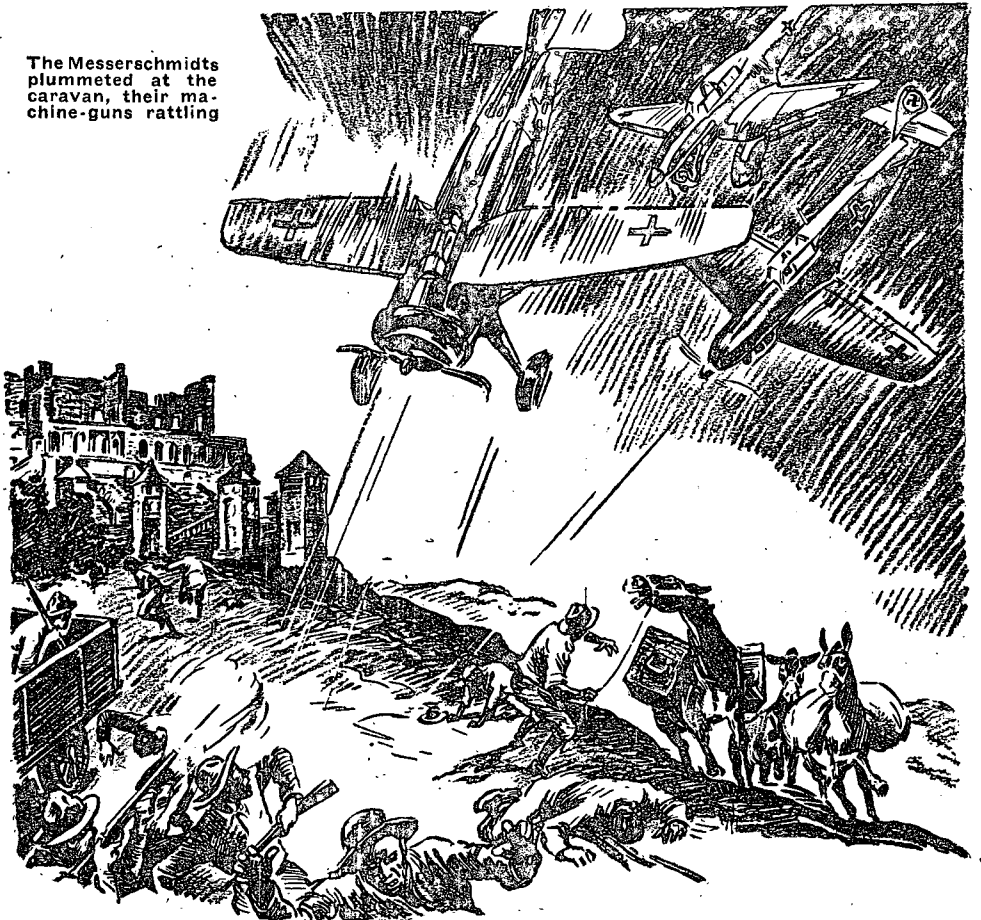
The calendar *was* changed in Washington's time. The people in those days *were* fond of costume balls. And it wouldn't have been beyond the humors of some of Washington's friends to dress up as a batch of misguided monarchs. The patriots of those days loved to lampoon the tyrants of the past; they cherished their Liberty, those early Americans.

We know Washington had his doubts, and we know he rejected them—perhaps he did remember all those rulers who, when given absolute power, had degenerated into tyrants.

At any rate, he was offered the crown, and he refused. He had his chance to be king. And he turned it down so that this government of the people, by the people and for the people might not perish from the earth.

Another of Theodore Roscoe's fine tales of an imaginary moment that might have changed our history, will appear in an early issue of the *Argosy*. You won't want to miss "—Then Placid John Adams"

The Messerschmidts plummeted at the caravan, their machine-guns rattling



Dark Thunder

By ROBERT CARSE

DAVID LOWE, foreign correspondent, goes to Haiti to expose a Nazi intrigue that threatens the safety of the Caribbean, and to find the girl he loves—the beautiful Margett von Rudvig. Since the time of Christophe the von Rudvigs have dwelt in Haiti; Margett's brother, Ernst, has lately served as a Condor pilot in Spain. According to Lowe's friend, Major John Folsom of Army Intelligence, Ernst von Rudvig is completely in the power of Colonel Count Maxim Spelke, a high Nazi officer now in Haiti.

ARRIVED at the island, David Lowe is invited to Crête à Moulin, the ancestral home of the von Rudvigs. There he finds Spelke and a dozen hard-faced German officers, with Margett and her brother at their service; and Lowe learns quickly what the Nazis are planning. A secret air base has been established at Crête à Moulin, and one night Lowe hears the drone of Messerschmidt planes. That same night Spelke kills Ernst von Rudvig, who is now useless to him, and accuses David Lowe of the murder.

But the Negro servant, Vaubin, can testify to Margett that Lowe did not kill her brother. So at last she understands the full horror of

This story began in the *Argosy* for November 25th

104

this silent Nazi invasion. She agrees to stand with Lowe and the Negro servants in defense of Crête à Moulin against the Germans.

But that night Spelke and a carload of men depart on an unknown mission to Christophe's Citadel, and David Lowe must follow them, leaving Margett at Crête à Moulin.

WITH his tough, faithful attendant, Monk, and a couple of dependable Haitians, David Lowe sets out on an exhausting and hazardous pursuit of Maxim Spelke. At length they reach the Citadel; Lowe enters the ruined fortress alone, to face Spelke and his men. Almost immediately Lowe is cornered by a German—to be rescued an instant later by the miraculous appearance of Major John Folsom at the head of a Haitian guard. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

KING'S GOLD

HE SAW clouds first, slow-moving across the high blue clarity of the sky, and then, turning his head a little, he saw the ramparts of the Citadel. You're David Lowe, he thought. You've been hurt, and quite badly, but now you're feeling a lot better. This is the Place d'Armes, the main courtyard.

That realization collected all Lowe's thoughts. He was once more fully aware of what had happened, what was happening. His hands stretched out to the grass-covered stone on which he lay and he tried to lift himself to a sitting posture. But then he heard the shots, the voices.

Men ran across the far end of the Place d'Armes, just within his vision. They were Negro soldiers of the Haitian Guard, and as they ran they fired their Springfield rifles from the hip. Good soldiers, he thought; they're not wasting a shot. But where's Big John, and where's Spelke?

The guardsmen had gone flat behind the rampart embrasures. They shot down at men David Lowe couldn't see. Yet bullets whipped the embrasure edges, and there was the sudden, throbbing blast of a Spandau gun. A grenade exploded some distance away, through its echoes the screams of wounded and dying.

A big, black sergeant of the Guard got

off his knees. He signaled the men at the embrasure to stop firing. "All over," he said. "The last of them went when the major threw that grenade."

He meant Folsom when he said the major, Lowe understood. Then the Germans were licked, chased out of the Citadel. Lie back, he told himself. Look at the clouds again. Your job's finished.

But John Folsom was coming towards him heavily striding, a pistol loose in his hand. Lowe looked into Folsom's eyes, and at once he was sure that Spelke still lived, had escaped.

"*De nada*," Folsom said. "Really a no decision scrap. Spelke had too many men for us, all that lot from the German ship. But I've got Guard scouts out tracking him."

"From what ship did he get men?"

"A big freighter that put out of Ciudad Trujillo in Santo Domingo last week. For the last couple of days, she's been lying off the beach beyond Cape Haitian. That's one reason I got the idea things were becoming pretty hot here. When I reached the Cape, the Guard officers told me about her."

"How did you come south?"

"Marine Corps plane, just as soon as I could after I got your cable. I was on my way to Crête à Moulin to look into that situation. Then I learned about the ship, and Spelke came through town like hell in the Mercedes. So I borrowed a platoon of the Guard and came up here after him. But I didn't think I'd meet you."

There was a concealed warmth, a tenderness of friendship in the last words, and David Lowe smiled at him. "Didn't think I'd meet you myself," he said. "If I had, I'd have saved you a drink."

"But Crête à Moulin has become a German base. They've got at least fifty fast bombers at the field they've built there. Ernst is dead; Spelke killed him. Right after he did, he left for here."

"I have a rather strong belief he was looking for some of the old Henri Christophe gold. Have you seen any signs of his looking for it?"

"Down at the other end, a bunch of fuses have been set leading into the cistern."

"Ernst said it was 'deep, deep'. He told me that when he met me out to sea in the *Hyperbole*. He came over trying to bomb Monk and me and I shot him down. Let's take a look at the cistern."

A COUPLE of the guardsmen helped David Lowe walk. They were going down the steps to the dank, lichen-walled square of the cistern when the hoarse yell rose behind.

Monk stood there at the top of the steps in the Place d'Armes. Hugo and Gros Catulle supported him, and around them were guardsmen who kept their fingers on their rifle triggers.

David Lowe laughed in almost hysterical relief. "Let them go," he told the sergeant of the Guard. "They're men who work for me." Then he called to Monk, "Come on down. We're going to have a little water-works display. Spelke's off in the woods somewhere, taking a sprint for his health."

The fuses along the cistern rim ran to two cases of submerged dynamite, John Folsom found. "What can be under all that muck and water?" he asked.

"Gold, I told you," Lowe said. "Detonate the stuff and then we look."

The dynamite made a rumbling concussion, flung the scummy water upward in greenish cascades. Then the water swiftly ebbed out through the shattered stone flooring. Black mud showed, and broken barrel staves, rusted musket barrels, all the detritus of a century.

"Ain't no fish," Monk said. "And ain't no gold, 'less it's down underneath."

"That's where I think it is," David Lowe said. He reached into his pocket and took out the crumpled scrap of parchment Margett had given him at Crête à Moulin. He studied the old, faded figures again, then passed it to John Folsom. "Looks like part of an old map to me. Margett found it on the floor of the library, up there at her home. Very soon after, Ernst was shot."

John Folsom rubbed his fingers across his brow. Then he turned and talked to the sergeant. "Bring down the lads who're stationed here," he told him. "And I want every shovel and pick and bucket you can find around the place."

There were six men of the regular Citadel guard. They were led by a stocky corporal who had a swollen welt along his jaw where he had been hit by a rifle butt. He looked frowning at the piece of parchment when Folsom held it out to him, and then he turned and talked fast in the Creole to his men.

"These boys were caught in their bunks by Spelke," Folsom told David Lowe. "They didn't have a chance to fight and were locked up in their own quarters. Now they're still kind of dazed, but I think the corporal can make sense."

"No man knows of anything here, Major," the corporal said. "Cistern's always been full of water, but water was too dirty to be used. We never even came down here much."

"There's an old story," David Lowe said, "that King Henri had thirty million dollars hidden somewhere in the Citadel when he died. Did you ever hear of that, Corporal?"

"*Mais oui, m'sieu*," the corporal said, and shrugged a bit. "Folks tell that story all the time. But nobody finds any gold."

John Folsom had been copying the figures on the piece of parchment, checking and cross-checking them. "All right," he suddenly said. "Hop down there in the cistern, every guy who can handle a shovel or a pick. I want that flooring lifted. Pile the blocks to one side where I tell you, and let's see what's underneath."

IT WAS very hot there in the sun. The mud stank, and blue bottle flies and mosquitoes swarmed about the men as they worked. But John Folsom got right down in the stuff, worked himself. He was the one who put his pick through the rotted, mud-covered top of the chest, in the cavity beneath one of the flooring stones.

The pick point made a hollow sound as it ripped the wood, but then it clanged on metal. All of them stopped working. The wounded men on the cistern edge craned forward. "Thirty million dollars," David Lowe said, "was the quoted figure. How much'd you strike, John?"

John Folsom and Hugo and the sergeant were lifting up the chest. It had greened brass handles at each end, and a massive lock. Folsom wiped the lock clean with his shirt-tail. On it was emblazoned the royal crest of Henri Christophe. He straightened, swung the pick high, hit the lock a ringing blow.

The lock wrenched back, hung loose. Folsom knelt and pushed the cover open. David Lowe was unable to see what Folsom was fumbling in his hands, but he could see his face.

It was ruddily flushed, and the mouth lines were taut, the eyes shining. Then Folsom got up, turned and came toward him. "Here," he said, "You're the one to examine these, *compañero*."

They were mostly old Spanish and English coins, doubloons, and pieces-of-eight, and sovereigns, rough-edged and crudely stamped, but all pure gold. David Lowe placed them beside him one by one in stacks on the mossy stone. He made the gesture mechanically, his mind held by a vision of Margett.

She should be here now, he thought. Her courage, her determination to remain at Crête à Moulin, had given him the incentive to make this discovery. If it weren't for her and that fragment of old Captain Johann's will he'd never have followed Spelke to the Citadel. And a great part at least of the gold here was hers by any decision of law. She was the rightful claimant, the last surviving member of the Von Rudvig family.

He looked at John Folsom grinning. "For an intelligence officer," he said, "you're fairly intelligent. But this isn't all. There should be a whole lot more."

"We'll get it," the big man said. "Spelke must have the rest of the parchment giving the location here. Now, though, it's not

going to do him any good. The German treasury will keep on being broke."

They found and hauled free chest after chest of gold during that day. For a time, the excitement of discovering each new chest, of knowing that they handled a tremendous fortune, maintained their energy. But then towards late afternoon they lagged, squatted down mud-stained and panting.

"Thirty million dollars, or very near it," John Folsom told Lowe. "It'd give the Nazis just the financial support they need to start a war. With it, they could make their Reichsbank a real bank again, refinance their entire system. We'll have to get the stuff out of here, down to Cape Haitian and a safer place. I want a lot more men to finish the job, and burros, trucks."

"Talk to Gros Catulle and Hugo," David Lowe said. "They'll give you dependable workers. But when you start the stuff out to the Cape it should be very well guarded."

"I'm not satisfied that Spelke's quit for good. He's too tough a man, and this is too big a prize for him to lose. . . . I begin to understand why Ernst did a bit of gambling in Spain. What's a few pesos to a man who knows he's got thirty millions behind him?"

"It cost him his life," Folsom said. "The gold must have been the threat Spelke kept over him all the time. As a man of German blood and one loyal to the Fatherland, Ernst should have reported this to Berlin a long time ago; he should have seen they got all or most of it."

"But I don't think you're right about Spelke. He can still play plenty of hell unless his base at Crête à Moulin is destroyed. Around here, though, he's licked. What can he do, with the *gendarmes* guarding our burros and trucks?"

David Lowe's eyes had become narrow, thoughtful. "How many *gendarmes* can you get to guard the stuff while it's being taken into town?"

"Maybe fifty more. There aren't a lot who can be taken from their regular duties

at the posts around here. Still, they'll be enough. Spelke's no fool. If he starts another scrap with the Guard, he'll have his country in a real international mess. He can't afford to do that, gold or no gold."

"You don't know the guy as I do," David Lowe said. "You haven't seen him up there at Crête à Moulin, singing the Condor song with his pack of pet mastiffs. Those men don't care anything for international law. It doesn't exist for them. All they believe in is what they call the glory of war. Get more *gendarmes* to guard the gold, will you?"

"I can't, Davey," Folsom said, an impatience of weariness making his voice harsh. "You're exaggerating the situation a bit."

"The Haitian government isn't convinced yet that the country is being seriously menaced by Germany. No word of what's going on at Crête à Moulin has got out to the Guard or any of the other officials. I had a hard time borrowing the platoon I brought in here. Another fifty men will be tops for what they'll let me have."

"After all, the main part of that gold will belong to Margett, and not the government. Now you should get out of here and down to the hospital. You don't look as though you feel too good."

"No," David Lowe said stubbornly. "I'll wait, and make the ride out with you. I want to be sure that the stuff's safe."

CHAPTER XVII

BEWARE OF THE SKY

FOG came up the mountain at dusk. The men worked by torchlight, but singing, for Gros Catulle and Hugo had brought in rum and food. Monk sat propped against the wall, counting the chests as they were swung from man to man up the steps to where the burros waited.

"Ay de mi," he kept saying. "What a time a fella could have cleanin' out one o' them in Havana. Kill yerself sure, but awful nice. . . ."

"Pipe down," David Lowe finally told him, the pain fierce-burning through his side. "We're leaving now. Get Hugo to help you up onto a burro."

They went from the Citadel in single file. The little, gray burros kept nose to tail, groaning and nickering under the weights of the chests. Along the winding trail, standing at the sharpest curves, were *gendarmes* with torches.

David Lowe was glad to see each one of them. A feeling of dread, of terrific nervous tension held him. It was not the pain of his wound, he recognized, but fear. He was afraid of Spelke; he couldn't help thinking that Spelke was going to come back.

But the dainty, narrow hooves of the burros kept on steadily over the slippery stone. Some of the beasts reached out and chewed at the leaves of wild banana and cane. Then the *gendarmes* cursed, beat them with sticks and the whole line took up a slow trot for a few yards. David Lowe looked down, into the plain and toward the sea.

Fog drifted white, thick over the sea. It was obscured, and only the coastal plain showed in grayish contrast. Then he saw the great, ruined walls of Sans Souci, the palace Henri Christophe had so proudly built.

The walls of it stood bleak against the softness of the mist. The leaves of the trees on the lawns were as black and flat as metal, untouched by any wind.

David Lowe's burro started to trot again, crossing the lawn. Below, on the far side of the terraces fronting the palace, were a lot of men and trucks. The truck motors had a ruffling beat, and the men's voices were loud. They stood in front of the Guard station there, light from the open doorways over them.

It won't be much after this, he thought. You'll find a seat in one of those trucks, ride quickly into town. But Spelke's coming back, coming back right now. There's his planes . . .

The planes flung down screaming from the sky. Their target was the parked

trucks and the men beside them. But they used no bombs. They strafed with the machine-guns. Tracers flickered a wide web of death. Burros reared. Men yelled, tried to get under the trucks, or stand and shoot.

David Lowe slid from his burro, let the animal run. Then he saw Folsom on the steps of the Guard station. Folsom had a Springfield; he was firing with it at the planes. "Get down, John!" Lowe called at him. "Get away from that light!"

Folsom heard him, partly turned. He was half way around when the machine-guns raked the steps, caught the big kerosene lamp on the porch and smashed it. The light then was only the tracer bullet flame. Folsom lay on his face gasping, his hands plucking vaguely at the Springfield sliding down the steps.

DAVID Lowe went to him. He explored the big man's head and body with his hands. Folsom had been deeply grazed over one eyebrow, that was all. But he was dazed, incapable of moving without help. Lowe did his best to get him back into the building alone, stumbled and fell from weakness.

He was there on the shattered steps, shielding Folsom's body with his body, as Hugo crawled up from the line of trucks. Hugo was unhurt, and cursing savagely in a low, slow voice.

"Must get out, *m'sieur*," he said. "We can't defend ourselves against those planes, not with rifles and automatics."

"I know," David Lowe said. "But where's the lieutenant in command of the post, or the sergeant?"

"Both dead," Hugo said "Will you give the order for the men to leave?"

"Yes," David Lowe said. "Tell them to form on you and follow you. I want two men to carry the major; send them straight here."

"Monk is on the other side of the trucks with Catulle," Hugo said. "I'll send them to you with two other men. You're not very strong yourself, *m'sieur*."

"That's right," Lowe said, and was surprised at the quality of bitterness in his

voice. A rage drove through him that made him want to weep. You're stupid, he thought, and futile. You and Big John Folsom contrived to get out the gold all very fine, just so Spelke could take it away from you like candy from a kid.

He picked up the rifle Folsom had fired and used it as a crutch to hobble down the steps. Monk and Gros Catulle were coming around the bullet-battered trucks, a pair of guardsmen with them. They crouched down near to the ground, watching the sky.

The huge German planes circled there at an elevation of about four thousand feet, ready to dive. "Come on," Lowe called. He waved his hand to the rest of the men around the trucks. "We're leaving. Follow Hugo. This is no place for us any more."

He dragged ahead of the little column, Catulle supporting him. The guardsmen and the civilian men who had been handling the gold staggered behind, fascinated by the planes, watching them all the time.

Now the planes were diving once more. But they flattened out over the old palace, released flares. A murky yellow light sprang from the flares, showed the sweep of greensward open and smooth past the terraces. The first plane landed there in a perfect dive. It swung, the propellers slowly slurring, and the pilot and observer leaped out to the ground.

They ran at once to the dead burros and the trucks carrying the gold. They tugged down a chest, ran with it between them back to the plane. Then they returned for another chest, and another.

David Lowe didn't wait to watch any more. He kept stumbling on along the road. Those planes, he knew, could carry two tons of bombs, or two tons of gold. It would tax their flying capacity and their flight distance would be short under such a load. But they would be able to reach Crête à Moulin, there refuel, take off for some further German base.

He gazed out seaward, toward the north and America. The whole world should hear about this, he thought. Here was interna-

tional brigandage on an enormous scale. Spelke's pilots had shot down more than twenty of the Haitian Guard tonight, killed them as carelessly as some cocaine-crazed gunman in a cigar-store stickup.

Sans Souci, the palace in which Henri Christophe had ended his life with a golden bullet, had never seen more brutal violence than this. Old King Henri and Captain Johann would laugh with ironic pleasure if they knew.

SENTRIES with bayoneted rifles held fixed posts all around Guard headquarters in Cape Haitian. Cars bearing the diplomatic license plates of the United States, France, Great Britain and Germany were parked in front. David Lowe quickly noted them as he passed the sentries on the way back from the hospital.

He had left Monk at the hospital, made sure that the black man was made comfortable. Then the doctors had examined and bandaged his own wound, advised him to stay off his feet for two weeks. But he'd just refused to answer them.

He must get back to Crête à Moulin, he repeated countless times to himself. Margett was there defenseless, except for Vaubin, and now Spelke had the gold, was free to move as he wished in any way. There was a great, constant danger for Margett.

In a lower office of the headquarters a smart young captain of the Guard rose from a desk and bowed. "You can go right into the conference, M'sieur Lowe," he said. "Major Folsom has told the ministers you'll present your testimony personally."

"No, I won't," David Lowe said. "But I want to talk with the major right away. Ask him to come out here, please."

John Folsom's fingers were yellow-stained from constant cigarette smoking, and they jerked with nervous fatigue. "Sit down, sport," he told Lowe. "What's on your mind? Why don't you want to testify to these chaps? They're the top men of their various governments in Haiti. Most of them have already sent hot cables back to their foreign offices."

"Proving what?" David Lowe said.

John Folsom shortly shrugged. "Not much. You see, nobody's sure of just exactly what happened. The dead men we found up at the Citadel couldn't be identified in any way. The planes that strafed us down in front of Sans Souci were unmarked. They might've belonged to any one of the score of nations, or have been privately owned. How could we tell?"

"And to make any definite statement now of what we think and suspect might precipitate an international war overnight. Don't forget Haiti's a small country, but an independent one, and can appeal directly to the States or Britain or France any time she wants to for immediate military help."

"Naturally," David Lowe said. "She should. But if I go in that room and start to testify, they'll keep me there for days. I know conferences. It'd be like Geneva, or Evian, and at the end of it nothing would be proved, or done. The next thing you're going to tell me is that I can't even put a story on the cable to Brick Hane-gan for the *Courier*."

"I'm afraid you're right," Folsom said, and frowned. "But we have to go easy. You can't just flatly sit down and accuse a major power of armed aggression here."

"Outright murder's the name for it. Why kid around? Up at Crête à Moulin, Spelke told me—"

"Quiet, Davey! Don't use that man's name. Not here, not now. If you won't testify, go buy yourself a drink, get some sleep. I'll try to finish this up as quickly as I can. Then maybe we can make a trip together to Crête à Moulin."

"Maybe, my neck," David Lowe said. "I'm starting for there immediately. I'm taking Hugo with me because he says he thinks he knows how we can get into the place, and because he wants to go. Shake all the diplomats' hands for me, and tell them without doubt they've got good intentions. But the girl I'm in love with needs more than a lot of words."

John Folsom took out his cigarette case, gave Lowe one, took one for himself. He

deeply inhaled before he spoke. "You make it kind of hard for me," he said. "You're right, though; you have to go. I'm a soldier, and I'm under orders. As soon as I can, I'll come up there looking for you. *Salud*. Take care of yourself."

"I will," David Lowe said.

Hugo sat in a cafe across the big square. He smiled as he saw David Lowe. "We go?" he said.

"Right away. Can you get a car?"

"I've got the Delage, *m'sieur*. A Guard driver brought it into town from Catulle's place."

"Then we should be back at Crête à Moulin by tonight."

"*Probablement, m'sieur*. It might take a bit longer this time."

"That gang will be watching the road, you mean."

Hugo calmly nodded. "But there are little side trails," he said, "that no one but a man who was born there knows. You're ready?"

David Lowe touched his pistol in his jacket pocket just to be sure he could quickly draw it. "Yes," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAN WITH A MACHETE

LIZARDS left the mountain rocks as the sun lowered and the shadows lifted up the ravine walls. David Lowe was glad the lizards were gone.

It was cooler now, too, and a wind was in the pines; it brought the rich, sweet scent of ripe cane from the plain below. He remembered the plain as something very far away. It was there he and Hugo had eaten last, taken cane stalks from a field, mangos from a roadside tree behind which they had hidden the Delage.

Then they had swerved from the road, followed a river that narrowed to a turbulently descending brook. Its waters dropped from great heights, and they had scaled them, clinging dizzily to roots and rocks. His few hours of rest at the Cape had returned part of his strength. But here he had lost it.

But when Hugo raised a hand and waved, he knew what the gesture meant. He scrambled up to where Hugo crouched, and saw on the immense ridge beyond the criss-crossed black arms of the windmill at Crête à Moulin.

He wanted to yell, to laugh, or weep, and kept completely silent. "Three more hours," Hugo murmured. "Then we're there. You can make it, *m'sieur*?"

He simply nodded. He was thinking of Margett, how her face would light up when he came into the room where she was. She was there, of course, he told himself. She had to be. If she wasn't, why . . . He drove that thought out of his brain. The effort of keeping up with Hugo was enough for him.

The beating of his heart reached upward to his brain. He climbed to the rhythm of it, lifting first one hand and leg, then the other. It can't last forever, he thought. You'll be there soon, with Margett. . . .

Dogs barked when they entered the coffee plantations beyond the crest. "German dogs," Hugo whispered. "They must have brought them here in their planes. We'll have to wait for daylight, *m'sieur*. Dogs like that will bark all night, give us away."

"We'll have to gamble we can get past them," David Lowe said. "Swing out wide and around the other way, to come in from the south."

It took a very long time to do that. They didn't hear the dogs any more, but they almost stumbled into brush-covered strands of electrified barbed wire. "Get set and jump," David Lowe told Hugo. "But be sure you jump high."

He landed in a jarring fall that badly stunned him. But Hugo landed right beside him, helped him to his knees. Then they crawled on, dragged through a softly rustling field of leaf tobacco, through a grove of lime trees. Right past the trees was an anti-aircraft gun emplacement.

Four men sat around the gun. They talked in German as they heated a tin of coffee over a small fire. One of them stood

and grunted in a surly voice when the others asked him to go out and get more wood.

"He's number one," David Lowe whispered. "I'll take him, Hugo. I'll feel better after I've dumped him."

The German wore heavy boots that made a thumping sound, and he smoked a pipe with a tin lid. David Lowe marked him by the little pink glim of light through the pipe lid perforations. He came in from the side, lunged to seize the throat.

He choked the man to death, holding him straining, pitching under him. He was possessed of an abnormal, maniacal strength. The German didn't have a chance, made no noise. When he was dead, Lowe let go of him, but picked up the pipe and the machete the other had carried. It's your turn, he thought. Now be smart.

Hugo's eyes showed pale in the darkness as he saw the pipe and the machete. "What are you going to do with those?" he asked.

"I want to get the rest of the gun crew," David Lowe said. "Kill all of them. I talk German, and I can light this pipe, come back swinging the machete as though I were the guy carrying the wood. Then when I'm close—"

His whispering voice suddenly broke. He was aware that Hugo looked at him almost as he would at someone insane. "*M'sieur*," Hugo said, "there's no reason to kill those three there. We can get past them all right. If we stopped for that, we might awake the whole place, and we'd be two against three anyhow."

David Lowe held himself very still. A cold, sick sweat pricked forth on his skin. He said his name beneath his breath, and through his brain was a dark terror.

You're getting to be like the Germans, he thought. All you're living for is to kill. Now you've got a taste for it. Sure, there's more thrill in hunting men than anything else that breathes and fights back. It's certainly more exciting than pounding out an overnight story for some copy-reader to pull apart on the desk.

It's just lovely, this killing, and you're

drunk, half crazy with the kick of it. In a little while you'll be just as much a brutish mastiff as any of Spelke's crew.

"You're right, Hugo," he said softly aloud. "We've got no reason to stop here. I got carried away a bit by hate, I guess. But I've got myself straight now. Lead the way, on toward the house."

THEY went with great caution, so slowly that at times they moved forward no more than a few inches. But they got around the gun emplacement, came at last to the edge of the freshly rolled flying field.

It was huge. Along the far side and the side facing the house were rows of planes under tarpaulins and a high, square pile of gasoline drums. David Lowe smiled, and his hands stretched flat on the ground.

"They're a methodical bunch of boys," he told Hugo. "They've put all their gasoline in one place. And all their planes are here in nice, tight formation. The gold must still be here, or some of the planes would be missing.

"Spelke's keeping doggo until he finds out what happens at that conference of big-wigs at the Cape. But we'll make up his mind for him. If we burn his gasoline he can't get the gold out, can he?"

"*Pas possiblement, m'sieur*," Hugo said. "He sure can't. But he'll be a damn' angry man."

"Time he got a bit angry," David Lowe said. "I've had my share. Let's slide around to the house side before we try our act. I want to get to see Mam'selle Margett, whether we win or lose with the gasoline."

Men with automatic rifles guarded the planes and gasoline drums. But a spattering, misty rain had started to fall, and they stood huddled, the corners of the plane tarpaulin pulled about their shoulders. Only one of them saw David Lowe and Hugo. He challenged in German, then started to shoot.

Hugo killed him with a swift pistol shot. David Lowe was up and running for the gasoline.

He ripped the bottom of the big tarpaulin loose, jammed it back between two drums. Then he sent a shot into a drum at the base of the pile, flicked a match into the thin splash of gasoline.

A lot of men were shooting at him by then, and he was forced to pitch himself flat, crawl away on his hands and knees. But the drums exploded in a frightful white gust of flame.

The night was seared the shade of molten steel. Cascading bursts of burning gasoline crested over the planes, caught the tarpaulin covers. Men dropped to the ground, held their arms over their heads. It was impossible to look into that fury of flame, to keep your eyes open at all.

David Lowe moved blindly, his jacket and his hair smoking, but toward the house, the memory of its location clear. He butted into shrubbery, into trees, stayed for several minutes under a rose bush, the wet petals clammy against his scorched skin, the smell fragrant and yet faint against the smell of the gasoline.

Men ran past while he stayed beneath the rose bush. They came from the house, carrying extinguishers and reels of hose. He heard their cursing voices, and then Hugo's voice. Hugo was near him, hunching forward from behind a tree.

"Time to get to the house is now," Hugo muttered. "Get in before they get back. What a hell of a fire that one does make. About half their planes are burning up."

"Very fine," David Lowe said. He rose, refilled his pistol clip and started steadily running for the house. Once, around by the rear door, he met a German, but the man ran after he shot at him. Then he was in the house, going up the stairs, standing in front of Margett's room.

A strange indecision claimed him there. He didn't want to knock, for fear Margett wasn't within, or wouldn't answer him. If she's been shipped back to Germany, he thought. If Spelke's given her a beating here, why your life's just all through, that's all. But then he heard her, moving across the softly carpeted floor. He rapped on the door panels, called her name. ~

SHE stood with her hands stiff at her sides after she opened the door. She looked into his face with a dull, almost uncomprehending regard. For a terrible moment, he thought she had lost her mind, did not recognize him. Then he saw that she began to smile, heard her say his name, and he embraced her, his head down on her shoulder.

"Margett," he murmured. "Oh, baby, it's been a long time."

"Yes," she said. "But I'm all right. "Nothing's happened to me, David. Come in, and close the door. Spelke may pass in the hall any moment. He suspects me, and he goes by here often to see what I'm doing."

David Lowe was shaking with reaction, could hardly stand. Margett led him across the room to a chair, then knelt beside him, kissing his hands and face.

"I had no idea where you were," she said. "And at night sometimes I'd get the thought that you were dead. When the planes came back with the gold, I was practically certain that was so."

"If you were dead, I thought, I would get a gun and just go and kill Spelke. Then the rest could do what they wanted with me, because my life wouldn't have meaning any more."

He smiled, stroking her pale, tensed face. "I had just about the same sort of thought," he said, "standing there outside the door. It took me quite a time before I could knock, I was so scared you weren't here."

"But what are we going to do, David?" she said. "How can we get out of here?"

"I don't know," he said. "We'll have to talk to Hugo. He's waiting in the hall. Maybe with him we can find some way."

Hugo had been standing just outside the door, the machete David Lowe had taken in his hand. Now he turned, moved into the room and made a warning gesture. "You want Spelke," he whispered. "He's right here."

"Stand back," Lowe told Margett. "This should finish it."

Hugo had gone flat against the wall in-

side the door, the machete lifted shoulder high. But Margett only moved to return to her chair.

Spelke had halted in the hall before the door. He wore uniform breeches now, and field-boots, and there was a pistol belt about his waist. He brought the big Mauser up and out very fast. "Tell the black to get away from that wall, Lowe," he said. "Tell him to drop his machete, and drop your gun. Quick!"

"Drop it, Hugo," David Lowe said. "He knows you're there."

Hugo dropped the machete, but as he let it go he swung forward. Spelke wheeled, leveled the pistol at him. In that instant David Lowe lunged.

He went in a headlong dive right at Spelke's knees. The Mauser barrel cracked his skull, nearly stunned him. But he had Spelke in a furious grip, tumbled him down, savagely kned him unconscious.

"Grab his hair," Hugo said. "I want to cut his head off, to look nice on a platter."

"No," David Lowe said, and shoved Hugo aside. "We'll have to wait before we make a trophy out of him. Now we've got to use him as an hostage. There's no way we can get out of here, with those guys guarding the trail down below."

"The place for us is in the windmill tower until our own guys show up. Where's Vaubin now, Margett? He's a man we could use."

"They've been making him cook for them," Margett said. "He's been beaten by them until I thought they'd kill him. But he has learned to keep silent, and right now he's probably in the kitchen."

"Then take a look for him there, Hugo," David Lowe said. "Collect all the food you can, and meet us at the tower."

"Oui, m'sieur," Hugo said. "Food, that will sure do real good."

DAVID LOWE grasped Spelke by the shirt collar and the hair to drag him out of the house. Margett went beside him, her head raised, her eyes wide, but no longer afraid.

"Bruecken," she said, "the man who sang that night at dinner, is guarding the tower. The radio set is in there on the upper floor, and he has orders to shoot anybody who doesn't show a written pass. But I can talk to him. He was in Ernst's squadron in Spain."

Bruecken stood wide-legged before the tower door. He held the automatic rifle very tight, called loudly to them to halt.

"Listen to me, *mein Freund*," Margett answered him. "This man could have killed Spelke a moment ago. But he spared his life so that justice can be done."

"It was Spelke who killed my brother, shot him because of the gold at the Citadel. I am certain of what I say, and you know I don't lie. Lower your gun. Open the door and let us into the tower. You must help us, take our side, if only for the reason you were Ernst's comrade."

"I believe you, *Fräulein*," Bruecken said tensely, "but I have a greater loyalty, to the Fatherland."

"Don't be a fool, soldier," David Lowe said. "Spelke represents the Fatherland here, and he kills whom he pleases. You might very probably be the next to follow Ernst."

"Ja," Bruecken said. "I can understand that." He was staring down at Spelke's face. In the relaxation of unconsciousness the man's true character showed. The features were heavy, cruel, and the high-rolled eyes held a dim glare of hate. "A man to the *Herr Oberst* has always meant something to kill, or be killed. We die, and he advances, gets more medals."

"Right," David Lowe said. "Now open the door."

They were crossing the broad stone sill when they heard Hugo. He came running from the direction of the kitchen, Vaubin beside him. Both their arms were full of food and water and rum jugs. Behind them, at the corner of the house, were half a dozen of the Condor Legion men. One shouted at the pair of black men to stop, then started to shoot.

"Here it goes," David Lowe said, and picked up Bruecken's automatic rifle,

loosed a burst in an enfilading sweep. The Germans went flat, took cover. But three of them lay out in the open still, spasmodically kicking the turf as they died.

Hugo and Vaubin were already across the lawn, safe against the wall of the mill. They came in breathing hard and laughing.

"*Bien venu*, M'sieur Lowe," old Vaubin said. "I kept telling Mam'selle Margett you'd come back. But you've surely picked the right prisoner."

"He's the one who'll count a lot for us," David Lowe said, and rolled Spelke over into a corner, then lashed him hand and foot. "Close the door. Bar it and barricade it with those cement sacks. Then get upstairs."

CHAPTER XIX

STORY FOR THE WORLD

THE Germans attacked with a stubborn and deliberate fury. One by one, in short rushes, they advanced toward the mill. Their companions gave them a covering fire, raked the slit-like windows of the mill with close volleys.

David Lowe grunted cursing in respect for their fighting ability. "They know every trick of the game," he told Hugo. "Look. The men by the house are digging fox-holes for themselves. The others out front, the ones making the rushes, never move together. One runs at a time, and always from a different angle.

"And they've got all the guns and ammunition they want. There's just two simple reasons why they don't bomb this place to the ground. They hope that somehow they'll be able to get Spelke out alive, and their radio set is here.

"If they knock the tower down, they get us for sure, but they lose their *Herr Oberst* and their only means of communication with outside. Now I'm going to take over that. I think maybe I can use it."

The radio was magnificent, immense. David Lowe studied its dials and control panels for twenty minutes before he found

how it worked. Then he pulled on a pair of headphones, squatted at the sending key. He tried various frequencies, widening his range every time.

"Too powerful for anything local," he said to Margett, crouched at his side. "I'm going to try to pick up New York. My old paper, the *Courier*, has a station of its own. If I can raise Brick Hanegan, I'll give him a story that will frizzle his hair at the roots."

He repeatedly gave the *Courier's* call signal, grinned over at Margett when he was answered. "Now we tell the world, honey," he said. "I've got the operator at the paper. Put the cigarettes where I can reach them. Hanegan will want to remake his front page with this."

The *Courier* operator was a former Navy man; he talked clearly and fast. "Come in, David Lowe," he said. "I get you fine. Hanegan's right here, and wants to talk to you."

"Tell him hello," David Lowe said. "But I'm in a hurry. This is a German military set I'm using. The Germans are outside, trying to take it back. I've got to get my story in quick. Get ready to receive."

"Hanegan wants to know," the *Courier* operator sent, "how much of a piece you've got."

"Enough for at least a column and a half. Get off the air. Let me send."

"Okay. I'm ready for you."

David Lowe lit a cigarette. Against the window slits the German bullets made a thin, chattering whine. Hugo and Vaubin and now Bruecken went from window to window, firing down at the men rushing for the door.

In that stone-walled and stone floored place their shots rang with unceasing echo. Smoke drifted the room, heavy and acrid. The gun flame was pale; it briefly flushed the tight, sweaty faces of the defenders.

You're right in the middle of it, David Lowe thought. You should write a piece to make them sit up and think from Tokyo to Rome to Berlin to London and New York and back. This is big, big and hot.

HE SET himself, bent lower over the key: "Nazi Germany has at last struck openly in the Western hemisphere.

"German bombing planes flown by pilots of the Condor Legion last night machine-gunned to death twenty-four men of the Haitian Guard. These men were guarding a sum of thirty million dollars in gold coin taken from the Citadel built by black King Henri Christophe. Before the mass murder of the Guard, the German force now operating in Haiti had attempted to get out the gold themselves.

"They were stopped by Major John Folsom of the United States Army Intelligence Corps. Major Folsom's presence in Haiti is not known outside yet. He is here to do everything in his power to stop the German drive of invasion.

"Tonight at Cape Haitian he is sitting with the diplomatic representatives of the major Western powers trying to decide how to keep the world in ignorance of the mass murder of the Haitian Guardsmen. The representatives of the powers are deeply worried, afraid of international war.

"Tonight, here at Crête à Moulin, where the Germans have set up a fully fortified military air base, nearly fifty of their bombing planes and their entire gasoline supply were destroyed by fire.

"The gold is here at Crête à Moulin. The Germans have it, but lack planes to fly it out to their other bases in South America. At the moment that I write, we are being attacked by Germans who are admittedly members of the Condor Legion.

"Here there is open war. If this piece is not finished, it will be because I have been taken prisoner, or killed.

"Colonel Count Maxim Spelke, a member of the famous Von Richtofen 'flying circus' during the World War and a close personal friend of Air Marshal Hermann Goering, is now our captive and hostage. He has personally and freely explained to me his purpose in Haiti, and the purpose of the German Government.

"It is the direct intention of the German Government to dominate in the Western Hemisphere. German flying bases for

months have been established in South America. German military pilots, men recently trained in the school of war flying for Franco in Spain, are gathered at these fields and have for their use fully equipped bombers of the Messerschmidt, the Heinkel Three and the Junkers J U Eight types. They will fly to attack any place, any people, immediately they receive their orders from Berlin.

"Haiti has already suffered their violence. Now the rest of the world must awaken to an understanding of danger.

"Germany in the hands of its present rulers is absolutely ruthless. International law, the recognition of rights of nations and individuals, no longer has meaning for the Nazi.

"I write now in open appeal. I must.

"There is no other way for me except to tell you the bald truth. At Crête à Moulin and at Christophe's Citadel I have seen the German military machine at work as it worked in Spain. The list of German triumphs will soon contain the name of Haiti unless the world is aroused.

"At Crête à Moulin, the home of the Von Rudvig family for a century, Ernst Von Rudvig recently was brutally murdered by Colonel Count Spelke so that Spelke might get the location of the Citadel gold. The lives of Ernst Von Rudvig's sister, Miss Margett Von Rudvig, and of several others are now—"

Margett touched David Lowe's shoulder. "David," she called to him. "David, stop! Spelke's getting away. He's broken through the door below."

DAVID LOWE lifted his finger from the key. He slid the headphones off and for several seconds sat very still. In his brain, he was writing his story yet, forming and sending the sentences to which he had given all his thought, all his emotion. But then he got up from where he had squatted. He wasn't a reporter any more; he was a man with a gun in his hand, and downstairs escaping was a man he hated.

He ran recklessly down the stairs, right

out in the middle of the curving steps. The door barricade of cement sacks had been dragged aside at one corner, the door bolts drawn. The massive piece of mahogany and iron was ajar. Beyond it, there was the flicker of gun flame.

He didn't see the man who shot at him. The bullets just made a spitting smack off the stone work of the staircase. He flung himself down, started crawling forward to close the door.

A lot of Germans were outside it. They fired in at him, and one man hunkered through, within his sight. He killed that man, but then he heard the metallic thud as a hand grenade was pitched along the floor.

He sprang back, and up around the first curve of the staircase. The explosion gave him the sensation that he was inside a great bell. His ears rang until he thought they would split. Blood spurted from his nose and mouth, and he lay gasping on the steps.

Vaubin pulled him out of there, carried him to the second floor. He gathered his senses enough to talk to Vaubin and Hugo. "Our prize got away from us," he said. "Spelke's gone. Now those guys won't stop for anything. Barricade the staircase. Hold them off. You know what we'll get if they catch us."

"Sure," Hugo said. "This way, we'll at least die fast."

He and Vaubin flung tables, chairs, every piece of loose furniture and planking across the staircase. Then they knelt behind it, fired down at the Germans. But they only had a few rounds left, and the Germans were resolute, daring men.

It became a hand-to-hand fight there at that barricade. Young Bruecken had received a head wound from a ricochet bullet at the windows. He wasn't much good, fought in sort of a semi-stupor. But David Lowe and Hugo and Vaubin kept their places, kept the Germans back.

Lowe hated himself for letting Spelke escape, and he wanted to finish his story. He struck at the Germans with his empty pistol and any object small enough to

throw. He cursed the men he sent tumbling back down the staircase.

"Take your whipping here," he yelled at them. "We're three, and a woman, and you're close to a hundred. What's the matter? Why don't you toss in a grenade? That radio set must mean plenty to you. I'll smash it, though, before you get me. You won't bring in any more planes over that beam."

He was silent then, ashamed of himself for his wasted breath and energy. Margett had advanced to the barricade. She carried Bruecken's short Nazi dirk, and her eyes were great, deep pools of flame. "Kill them, David," she said. "Don't talk to them. We haven't time."

THE Germans came massed, shoulder to shoulder. Now the dead couldn't fall back; there were too many men behind them. The attackers trod right over them, up and in at the barricade. The place reeked of blood, of sweat, pealed with the clash of blows and the cries of the wounded.

David Lowe had passed the point where his comprehension was clear. He simply stood and tried to kill. Margett was beside him; he knew that and nothing else. All the rest of his nature was concentrated in striking at the lurching, grayish bodies and blurred white faces.

When the plane dived down he didn't hear it. Margett had to tell him, grasp him hard by the arms to stop his blows. "A plane," she said. "But not one of theirs. They don't know what it is, and they're leaving us to see."

The shout came from outside. Some man on the front steps of the tower made it. "Amerikaner!" he yelled. "Get out of sight!"

David Lowe went staggering to a window slit. The plane was breaking through high cloud, diving in a smooth rush of power. Then the German searchlights cast their white points of light, crossed, re-crossed until they caught the plane.

It was a Vought Corsair, a United States Marine Corps plane.

David Lowe spread his hands on Margett's shoulders. "Wrong," he whispered to her. "That's suicide. They'll tear it out of the sky."

He had called the turn.

The German anti-aircraft guns were already firing. A burst bloomed red-green behind the plane, made it swerve bucking sidewise. It whirled up, twisting into a climb. But the shells hammered the air around it, came closer, closer.

Margett gasped. "Our last chance—and there it goes."

The star-marked wings trembled in the searchlight glare. It was like a bird over a shooting box, David Lowe thought, and the hunters were too good.

A burst hit a wing, and the wind shredded clean what the shrapnel left. The plane pitched downward, spun crazily. "Too low for parachutes," Bruecken said, craning beside Margett and David Lowe. "Not a chance."

But the pilot kept control for an instant more. He tried to level off, make the lawn. A limb of a great oak tree dragged his tail assembly, and the elevators ripped away like paper. Then the plane crashed, down through the raking limbs of the tree.

The plunge was terrific.

The motor buried deep in the turf of the lawn. Steel moaned, cracked, split. There was the pungent smell of spilling gasoline, but no flame. The light came from a flashlight held by Maxim Spelke.

He moved to the wreckage with a steady stride. The two men who had been in the plane lay yards from it. He played the searchlight over both of them. The nearest was the pilot, and nearly all his bones were broken, and he was dead. The other man was John Folsom. He was conscious still, tried to push up on his hands to face Spelke.

It was a gallant effort, but altogether useless.

Spelke kicked him prone. Then he turned and faced the tower. "I've wasted enough time and men, Lowe," he said.

"Come on out of there within five minutes or your friend here will have a very unpleasant death."

"Don't go, David," Margett said, convulsively squeezing Lowe's hands. "Don't listen to him. He's a beast, but he wouldn't torture your friend. The other men wouldn't stand for it; they respect a soldier."

"I'm not so sure he won't," David Lowe said. "Anyhow, I'm not going out there. We'll stay in this place until we can figure some way we can leave it alive."

After all, there's got to be some way. And then—

"But now I'm going to get on the key again, make Hanegan run off another extra addition. This time, Spelke pulled his stuff on a Marine Corps plane, and that's awfully close to home."

He had tried to make his words sound calm, keep his tremendous emotion out of them. But as he worked the radio key his hand shook so much he could hardly send. The station came in fast.

"A new lead for that story," he told the *Courier* operator. "Major John Folsom has just been shot down here at Crête à Moulin by German anti-aircraft while flying in a Marine Corps plane. With him was an unidentified Marine Corps pilot who is now dead."

"Colonel Count Spelke has made Major Folsom a prisoner, warned me that if I and the people here with me in this tower don't surrender, Folsom will receive a very unpleasant death."

"Put that last phrase in quotes; it's Spelke's own words. So long for now. I've got things to do."

But before he got off the earphones the *Courier* operator came back at him very fast. "Hanegan wants to talk to you," he said. "Hanegan says you must listen to him."

"Tell Hanegan I can't," David Lowe said. He was looking up, and across the room at the barricade. "Tell him I'm sorry, but the Germans are back and coming up the stairs."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : BY W.A. WINDAS



• CHEVRONS •

This device on the sleeve for marking officers and non-commissioned officers (in America, only the latter use it) is derived from an architectural term viz:- "CHEVRE" the French word for goat. It means the forming of two rafters into an apex or roof, and was named for its fancied resemblance to goat horns. In heraldry, the wearer of a "chevron" was the chief supporter of the head of the clan, "the top of the house."

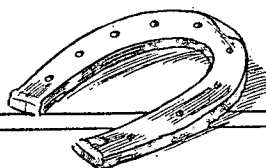


• WAR PENSIONS •

Early in the 16th. century Britain raised a fund to compensate widows and the families of soldiers who had been killed in action.

• HORSE SHOES •

Since earliest times, man attempted to protect the hooves of horses, but not until 480 A.D. were the first metal shoes introduced by Byzantine cavalry.



• ENSIGN •

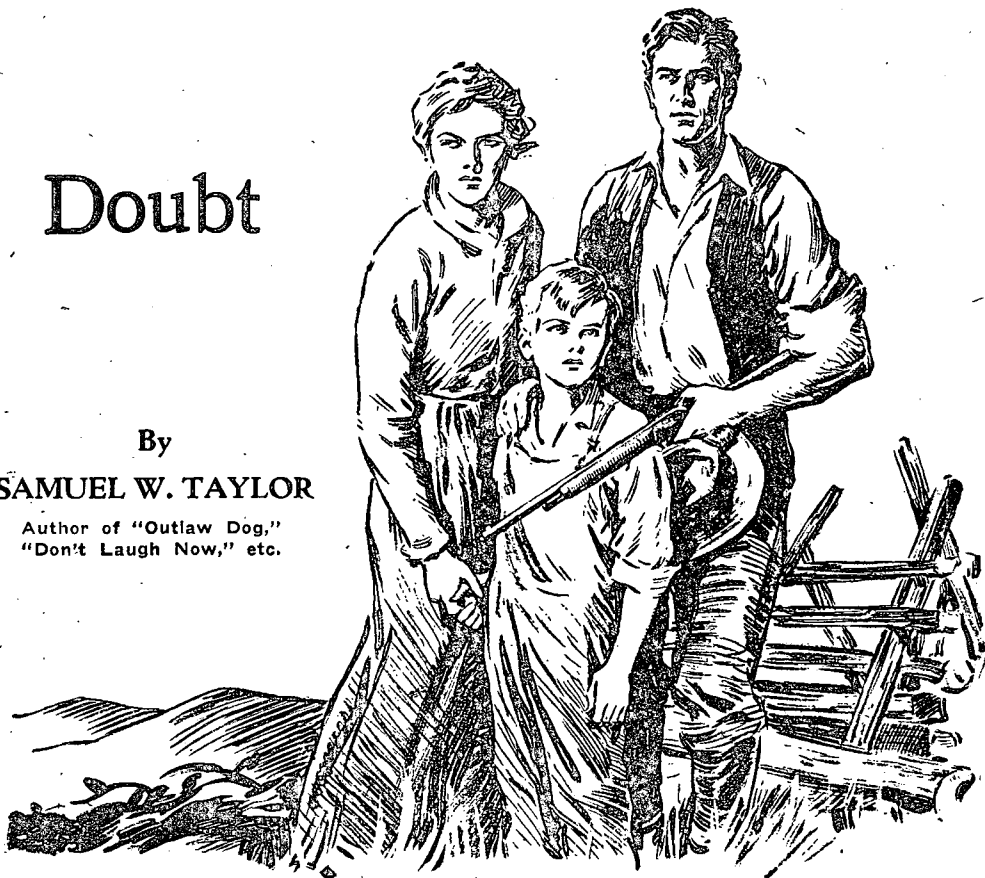
Today, this is looked upon as a purely naval rank. However, in the United States, it was first the lowest rank of commissioned officer in the army.

Doubt

By

SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

Author of "Outlaw Dog,"
"Don't Laugh Now," etc.



"I know what friendship means," he said. And he thought he did. But in the play of light and shade across the hills, the fallow black earth in the valley, the plunge of a wounded elk—he had forgotten something

TO BUB, the thing was like the feel of a storm over the dry-farm country, when something would come with the wind over the lava beds and sulphur bush, or something would be in the sky or the brass sun or in the high puffs of cloud whose level bottoms could be seen over the west mountains and a hundred miles beyond.

It was something you couldn't take hold of; but you could feel it, and, so could the animals. The prairie dogs would be active, the calf would kick up its heels, and the horses would drum around the corral.

This thing was in a sense the same. But knew it had to do with Mom and Dad and Brother Hull, who was Dad's best friend. Bub didn't know what it was, but he could feel something impending, and it was like an approaching storm or like a fence wire being inched tighter and tighter by the stretcher.

As near as he could tell, the thing started that day he and Dad went out with the .22 to knock over some jackrabbits. Dad wanted to get his eye in, because he was going deer hunting with Brother Hull the next Wednesday, which was Dad's birthday.

Dad always went out after a deer on his birthday, and Brother Hull always went with him.

The morning air stung Bub's face a bit and stiffened his fingers, as he went with Dad after jacks. They went along the section line to the brushy foothills above the Flat.

The mountains above them were all colors with the autumn, and below the fall wheat made patches of rolling green velvet in the black fallow land on the dry-farms of the Flat. Beyond the Flat, in the valley, was nothing but gray sage and sulphur bush.

Bub started as a jackrabbit was suddenly out of nowhere before them and streaking uphill over the stunt brush. Dad gave a short whistle and the jack hesitated; then it was too bad for that jack. Dad's gun just came up to his shoulder and went off. Dad never seemed to aim.

"Your eye is all right, Dad," Bub said admiringly.

Dad just grinned. He let the next jack get farther away before he whistled. He knocked over half a dozen in a couple of hours. They just let the rabbits lie; Dad said you might get deer fever if you handled them.

"Pretty thick this fall," Dad said. "Have to be setting out some poisoned bait."

When the next jack jumped he said, "I'll try this baby on the run," and this time he missed. The bullet kicked a yellow spurt just ahead of the running rabbit. The jack stopped frozen in its tracks. "Led too far," Dad said, pumping in a fresh shell.

"You can still get him, Dad!"

Dad shrugged. "I had my chance. Give him his."

The rabbit got over its fear and began running again. "You don't give them much of a chance with poison," Bub said.

"That's war," Dad said. "This isn't."

He let Bub carry the .22 some of the time, and Bub was careful to keep it pointed at the ground. Bub didn't hit any jacks; they didn't sit up long enough at the whistle, but Dad said he'd get better

with practice so Bub didn't mind missing.

After lunch Dad set up their lunch sack as target and let Bub shoot a magazine-load at it. They saw some sage hens along in the afternoon and Dad shot the heads off three of them. "Let's take one over to John," Dad said.

JOHN was Brother Hull, Dad's best friend, and Bub wondered afterwards if the thing would have developed if Dad hadn't wanted to take a sage hen to Brother Hull.

They headed diagonally down the hills towards the south, and they were still some distance away when they saw Brother Hull's place from a ridge. Bub said, "Looks like our car in front." It was easy to tell the car, because when the top wore out Dad had made a new one out of white canvas.

"Your mother's probably taking John a pie," Dad said.

They went down off the ridge, and didn't see Brother Hull's place for about an hour or better. "I guess Mom and Brother Hull are having a talk," Bub said. "Our car's still out in front."

"Let's set down a spell," Dad said.

Bub was willing enough; he was pretty tired. They were on a little hill just above Brother Hull's place, however, and it seemed like Dad ought to have gone the remaining distance before resting.

He noticed something about Dad's face, a sort of laxness, with the eyes rather wide and fixed, and thought Dad was just tired, until Dad got out a cigarette and lighted it.

Then Bub sensed something was wrong, because Bub wasn't supposed to know Dad smoked. But now Dad seemed to have forgotten Bub. The sun was over the wide gray valley to the west, about two hours above the mountains, and Dad sat on the hill by a big rock, looking over at Brother Hull's place and smoking.

After a while Bub said, "I guess I'm rested, Dad," but Dad didn't move. After a while more Bub said, "It's sort of getting cold, Dad," but still Dad sat there.

Bub couldn't see what there was to look at. There was the white house with the sheds and stable and haystacks and corral behind, the pattern of the fields.

Of course, Brother Hull had a better place than the dry-farmers over on the Flat, because he had a spring and could have an orchard and a patch of irrigated lucerne and a garden, which of course none of the dry-farmers on the Flat could have when all their water was pumped from wells sunk two hundred feet and more through the lava.

Still, Dad certainly had seen Brother Hull's place plenty of times before. Dad or Mom was always taking a pie or something over, because Brother Hull wasn't married and had to cook his own grub.

Brother Hull was always coming over for an evening. He and Dad traded work a lot and went fishing and hunting together, and borrowed each other's tools and implements so much that they both chipped in to buy a disc harrow because they couldn't remember which one had owned the one that wore out.

The wind and the sun got colder. Dad finally said, "Let's go home. And listen, Bub," he said when they were going north across the hills. "Don't say anything about us seeing the car there. Understand?"

Bub nodded, somehow feeling a little afraid, though he didn't know why.

When Mom got back it was almost dark. Dad kissed her and then stood with his hands on her shoulders, looking at her face in a steady, searching way. Finally he grinned, gave her another kiss, and the lax vacant look was gone from his face.

THE next day Dad was out at the shop going over the running gear of the wagon when Mom came out and said, "I'm taking a run into town. Want anything?"

"I might as well go in with you," Dad said.

"You'd better stay and get this wagon in shape. We don't want the bad weather to catch us without wood."

Dad was boring a hole in a strap of

iron. He turned from the post drill to look at Mom.

"And anyway," she said, "I'm all dressed and ready to go."

"All right," Dad said quietly. "No; I don't want anything."

There were two ways to get to town. One straight west across the valley along the section line to the highway and then south, the other directly south through the rolling foothills. Dad generally went the hill road because it was shorter and he could drop in on Brother Hull on the way.

But there were four Mormon gates to take down and put up, this way, and the road was worse, so Mom generally went the other way. Today she took the hill road, however. Dad would keep looking over in that direction out the door of the shop as he worked.

He got a pole of aspen from the woodpile and began shaping a brakeblock. That vacant laxness was in his face, and sometimes he seemed to be looking at but not seeing what he was doing.

He fitted the brakeblock, and then, sawing a length of aspen for another, came to a pause with his eyes fixed. Suddenly he moved fast. He dropped the saw and began striding for the south fence. He was stooping through the wires when Bub called, "Where you going, Dad?"

Dad came back slowly. He put a big hand on Bub's head, and smiled a little with lips tight together.

"You think your old dad is all right, don't you?"

"Gosh, yes, Dad."

"And Mom, too."

"Sure, Dad."

"Why?"

Bub had never thought of it that way. He didn't know what to say. "I—I just know."

Dad nodded. "You just know we're all right." His fingers tightened in Bub's hair until it hurt. "That's right," he said.

Mom didn't get back until sundown. "I didn't get anything in town," she said when Dad said he'd carry the stuff in from the car. "I was going to get a tapestry to

work on during the winter—like the one I made after we were first married. But it's so much work I want a good pattern. I'll have to send off, I guess."

"And I'll be stumbling over the frames all winter," Dad said. He laughed, but it didn't sound happy.

Bub thought it strange that Mom should have taken so long to look at a tapestry pattern. The Co-op would be the only place in town where you could get such a thing. But Bub was feeling something strong and tight running under the surface of things, and he kept out of it.

HE WENT with Dad next morning to shag a load of wood out of the canyon. The road switched through the foothills and then made a steep turn to the cutbank road on the north slope of the canyon.

Dad stopped the team there to rest, and looked back over the valley. The hills fell down to the fringe of dry-farms and the lava outcroppings, and the valley stretched smooth and gray beyond to the west mountains. The town was a clump of trees over to the south.

Down on the highway a car was making a streamer of dust. You could see the whole valley from this point. Brother Hull's place was in its little green hollow, and by the house was a tiny car with a white top.

Bub began saying, "Looks like Mom must have baked some pies and took one—" when Dad cut the team with the lines and they jumped. Bub almost rolled backward off the seat.

The next morning Mom took the car and went along the south hill road, saying she was going to a Relief Society gathering, and she was away all day.

The next day was Sunday and they all went to Meeting. Brother Hull wasn't there; he'd been invited to talk over in the next town. It was thirty miles away but of course that was nothing with his big new car.

The bishop gave the main talk, and spoke about faith. After Meeting, Dad said

to the bishop, "Brother Wells, I certainly enjoyed your message this evening, and I feel as if the Spirit of the Lord descended upon you as you spoke."

"Thank you, Brother Thompson," the bishop said. "And how is everything with you, Brother?"

"Okay," Dad said. "Everything's fine. How's your fall wheat?"

The bishop said it was a little dry—it had been dry as long as Bub could remember back, always—and they talked about that. But Dad seemed to be more cheerful that night and until the next day when Mom went away to town alone again, saying she had to see if that tapestry pattern had come.

When she was gone Dad's face got that lax wooden look, and he would pause in the middle of something and just stand staring at nothing. It scared Bub a little.

When Mom came back that afternoon she had Brother Hull in the car with her. Bub liked Brother Hull. You remembered him by the way his white teeth shone in his tan face. He was always smiling. When people talked about him they always said they didn't see why he wasn't married, him having a nice place and being so good-looking and all.

Brother Hull yelled, "Hi, you old coyote!" from down by the gate, and rode on the running board up to the house.

"I invited him over to supper," Mom said.

"That's a lie," Brother Hull said. "I invited myself." He made a lunge for Bub, mussing his hair, then crouching like a prize fighter and growling, "Come on, tough guy. So you want to make something out of it, huh?"

MOM went in to get supper, and Brother Hull said to Dad: "Take a look at this, Will." He got a rifle out of the car. A brand new deer rifle. Dad's face lighted up. He sure did like guns. "Like 'um, huh?" Brother Hull asked, and Dad said, "Boy, do I!"

Mom called for Bub to get a bucket of water from the windmill well, and

Brother Hull got a washtub and said, "Let's take the lady some water while we're at it."

Dad remained sitting on the car running board, inspecting the new rifle. Brother Hull carried the tub into the kitchen, filled the stove reservoir and the bucket and the wash basin and poured the rest in the separator bowl.

"Has Will said anything?" Brother Hull asked. He spoke in a lower tone than usual, in sort of a secret way.

"No," Mom said. "But any other man in the world would have been suspicious long ago."

"The innocent, trusting sort," Brother Hull said. "And it's lucky, at that. I might be afraid, otherwise."

"Now, John," Mom said. She added: "I'll be over tomorrow, somehow. But I'm running out of excuses."

"Well, it won't be much longer," Brother Hull said. He and Mom smiled at each other the way people do who know something somebody else doesn't.

Then Bub saw Dad standing at the screen door. Dad's face was white and hard, and he was gripping the new rifle, and Bub suddenly felt very afraid.

Mom and Brother Hull didn't see Dad. One of them had said something and they were laughing together there at the stove. Dad was just outside the screen door with his face in shadow, and it seemed to Bub that the wide eyes had sort of a light in them.

Dad's eyes went to Bub, and Bub was afraid of Dad. Then the light seemed to go out of the eyes as Dad looked at Bub, and Dad turned and walked heavily across the yard, swaying in a peculiar way as he went, as if the hard earth were a moving wagon bed he was on.

That evening Dad would keep looking at Mom and at Brother Hull in a searching sort of way as if he had never seen them before, or as if he were seeing something in there he hadn't noticed previously. He would laugh with them and talk with them, but even while he was laughing his eyes would be watching.

The next day while Mom was away in the car, Dad shot in the sights of his old .30-.30 deer rifle. Dad set up a target against a lava outcropping, paced off a distance, and adjusted his sights until he could cut the black spot on the target every time.

"Bub," Dad said, "I was going to take you hunting this year, wasn't I?"

Bub nodded.

"I always like to keep my promises to you, Bub; but I don't believe you'd better go along in the morning. One thing, I don't know if you're big enough yet for the climbing."

"Gee, Dad, I can—"

"And another thing. You never can tell what will happen. Accidents, and so on. You'd better stay home, Bub."

THE wind was hard and sharp next morning. Bub heard Mom and Dad moving around while it was still dark. The smell of frying bacon came into Bub's room.

Pretty soon Brother Hull was yelling from outside, and then his laugh was in the kitchen. Bub got up and dressed, went carefully from his room through the front room, out the front door, around to the back past Brother Hull's big car and crawled in the back of Dad's car.

There was a tarp there between the seats and he got under it. Bub wasn't supposed to go, but the tight impending something wouldn't leave him alone, and he felt, somehow, that Dad needed help; he also had the feeling that his presence helped Dad. He didn't know why, but he remembered the way the hardness had gone from Dad's face and the terrible light from his eyes at the screen door.

Bub lay there shivering under the tarp for what seemed a long time. He knew they would use Dad's car, because it wouldn't be hurt by the mountain roads. Bub could see a little bit of sky, and it was going purple when Dad and Brother Hull came out the door and crunched across the yard.

Bub pulled the tarp over his head.

"Oh, I want to tell Mary something," Brother Hull's voice said. "Start the car and I'll be right back."

The car squeaked as Dad climbed in, began shaking when the motor started. Pretty soon something hit the other running board and Brother Hull said, "Okay."

It was bumpy for Bub, lying on the floor between the seats. The car soon was in second gear, rocking and bumping while the engine whined. The floor got harder and harder. Bub's hips and shoulders and legs got sore everywhere they touched. He turned over under the tarp and got the other side sore.

Finally he stood up and said, "Dad, are you mad at me?"

Brother Hull burst out laughing, and he laughed so hard that Dad's frown went away. "Climb up here between us," Dad said gruffly. He gave Bub a red bandanna and told him to tie it around his head so he wouldn't look like a deer.

"When we get there, stick close to me, keep behind the gun, and don't whine if you get tired," Dad said.

Finally the car wouldn't go any farther and they left it and climbed. They kept going through brush and aspens and pines. Bub got pretty tired but he didn't say anything.

Dad and Brother Hull went along side by side, and Bub tagged a few steps behind. Brother Hull's eyes kept roving over the slopes, but Dad seemed to be watching Brother Hull. Dad didn't seem to be looking for deer at all.

IT WAS almost noon, and Bub was thinking about resting, when Brother Hull brought up his new rifle, shot, and then was running down a slope yelling, "Got him! Got him!" He was laughing as he ran. "Didn't you see him, John?"

"No."

"A big one. An elk! And you didn't see him! I must be improving. This is the first time I've spotted one first!"

They ran down into a little hollow with clumps of brush in the bottom and grass between the brush. There was a stand of

aspen on the north slope, some yards away.

"He ain't here!" Brother Hull cried when he reached a clump of brush in the hollow. "But I knocked him down. Man, was he a whopper! A bull elk! It wasn't any deer. Look, Will, he can't get out of this hollow without us seeing him, unless he goes up through the aspens. I'll hike up there and you scout around here."

"I don't see any signs," Dad said.

"I tell you I knocked down a bull elk," Brother Hull called back as he ran for the aspens.

"Dad, let's look around here in the hollow," Bub said. He didn't like the look on Dad's face. Brother Hull had disappeared into the aspens, and Dad was looking up that way instead of around the hollow.

"Dad!"

Dad didn't seem to hear. He had his .30-.30 in his hands with his finger on the trigger, and his thumb brought the hammer from safety to full cock. He wasn't looking around among the brush in the hollow. He was looking at the aspens where Brother Hull had gone.

A twig snapped off the bush close to Dad's head and a shot whipped out of the aspens. Bub was numbed by the realization that Brother Hull had shot and the bullet had clipped that twig. The next instant Bub went sprawling as Dad hit him.

"Stay down!" came Dad's snarl. Lying there, he saw Dad crouch low by a rock behind the brush. Bub couldn't say anything. Dad's face was hard, and there was that light in his eyes.

But now the face was grimly smiling. Or maybe the expression wasn't a smile. He hunched low there by the rock with his eyes on the aspens. Brother Hull broke into view, running towards Dad. He probably couldn't see Dad because of the brush Dad was behind. He had the new rifle in his hands, ready as he ran.

Then Dad brought his .30-.30 up to his shoulder in that easy quick way and aimed at Brother Hull.

Things curiously stood still for Bub.

There was suddenly no wind, no movement. Dad was a hunched statue. Brother Hull was suspended in the middle of a stride. Then things were moving again as Dad yelled: "Watch out, John! Get to cover!"

BUB realized the rifle hadn't gone off the instant the stock hit Dad's shoulder, as it usually did. Dad was sighting down the barrel, but the barrel was shaking. He lowered the gun a bit, and yelled again: "Watch out!"

In a flashing instant Bub thought of that rabbit Dad had missed, and then let go. This was somehow like that. Brother Hull had shot at Dad, but Dad couldn't shoot back if Brother Hull were exposed out in the open.

"Take cover!" Dad was yelling hoarsely.

"It's all right, Will!" Brother Hull cried. He ran right past Dad. "Yes; it's all right. I got him this time."

Dad turned around and saw the bull elk. It was about a dozen yards behind him. One horn had rooted up the grass as it nosed to the ground.

"He was charging you from behind," Brother Hull was saying. "Wounded and plenty on the prod. You were looking the other way, and didn't hear because of the wind, I guess. I didn't have much time and I had to cut pretty close to you—"

Brother Hull sat down, suddenly limp. "My gosh, Will, that was the toughest shot I ever hope to make. The elk was right in line with you. . . ." Brother Hull ran a hand slowly over his face.

Dad sat loosely, lips sagging, looking vacantly at nothing. He said presently in a stumbling way: "If you—if that shot—If you hadn't shot then I would have been—If the elk had killed me, then you—"

"Oh, shut up," Brother Hull said, trying to smile. "Don't get soft on me, Will. We've got to tote this baby back."

. . . Brother Hull was chattering and laughing excitedly as the men cleaned the elk, but Dad was silent. Bub didn't know why, but he felt that whatever the trouble was, it was still there; it was even worse.

THEY got back after dark. Mom came out and was sure happy about the elk. Dad and Brother Hull hung it in the stone cellar behind the house.

"I'll cut some steaks," Mom said. "I'll bet you're half starved, the three of you."

"Wait a minute," Dad said. "I want to say something." Then he told about Brother Hull shooting the elk. Brother Hull tried to stop him, but Dad kept on. Then he talked about friendship, and about sacrificing for friends, and about how a man could be a man and step aside without making a fuss and not ruin other people's lives if they wanted it that way.

"He's gone soft," Brother Hull said to Mom. "He'll be all right in the morning." Brother Hull grinned, but it was a tender sort of grin. Mom was holding the lamp, and Bub thought her eyes were moist and so were those of Brother Hull and Dad.

"I just thought I'd say that," Dad concluded. "I know what friendship means. You and I and John. And it's above everything else. Everything else." Then he said: "I know about everything. About you going over to John's."

Mom's lips tightened. She looked at Brother Hull. Brother Hull looked at her, and then cocked an eye at Dad.

"Will Thompson!" Mom said, "if you don't beat anything! 'Why, you sly thing! You knew all along! And all that trouble I went to!'"

Then Brother Hull began laughing and things happened too fast for Bub to catch for awhile.

People were piling down the cellar steps yelling, "Surprise! Surprise!" And Mom kept saying: "It makes me so mad! He knew all along!"

Brother Hull just kept laughing. The cellar got full of people, all talking and laughing at once.

There was Brother and Sister Nelson, and Brother and Sister Higgs, and Brother and Sister Lamb, and Brother and Sister Jacobs, and there was Brother Ainsley who wasn't married, and Sister Effie Jones whom Brother Ainsley was going to marry.

Dad was just sort of blinking, and he

didn't struggle much when the men started spatting him for his birthday.

Then they all went up to the house and the sisters were holding up a tapestry for Dad to see. It was a big one, with a design around the border and in the middle a picture. The sky of the picture was blue and the grass green and yellow and brown, and the brush and mountain behind and everything was just as natural as seeing it, and it was all made out of different colored yarn that Mom had sewed onto it.

"I've been working on it two years," Mom was saying. "And I thought it was a surprise. Finally last week I saw I couldn't get it done in time, the way I had to put up the frames and work a little while you were away, so I set the frames up over to John's place and gathered the sisters up in the car on the way over and we all went at it and got it done. . . .

"But you knew all along!"

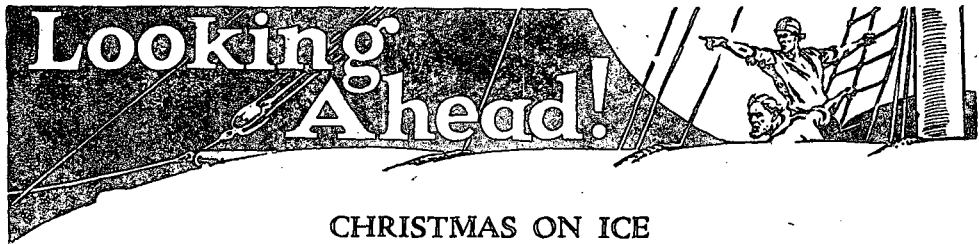
Dad was just gulping. "And don't look surprised!" Mom said. Everybody was laughing. Then Dad was gulping some more and looking at the new deer rifle in his hands that Brother Hull was giving him for his birthday. "Might as well of let you use it today," Brother Hull laughed. "I'll bet you knew all along it was for you!"

When Bub was in bed after the people had gone, he was almost asleep when Mom's voice sounded faintly: "Will, aren't you coming to bed?"

"I'm looking for something in the Book of Mormon that I want to look over," Dad said.

"What part is it?"

"Well," Dad said, "it's something about faith. I'd ought to look that over some more."



CHRISTMAS ON ICE

Raw Emotion—that's what the doctor, and the director, ordered. So Hollywood sent a cargo of assorted lounge reptiles, cameramen and America's Whoosh Girl No. 1 up North to pretend to become icebound. The only trouble was that, around December 25th, the ice really did close in on them, with only No-Shirt McGee to keep them from mass mayhem! A holiday novelet, by

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

FOREVER ENGLAND

The heritage of generations of stout Britons bore its finest fruit in that brave Wilton who fought shoulder to shoulder with Lawrence of Arabia. Here is the story of how his great spirit remade the lives of two lesser men. A novelet of *Bretwalda*, the mystic axe, by

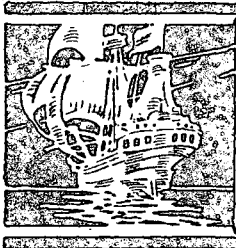
PHILIP KETCHUM

ROMAN HOLIDAY

Lonny was a has-been pug, living on borrowed time; but when he walked away from his last fight, St. Nick was right there beside him and clear bells were ringing for his special delight. A stirring Christmas story by

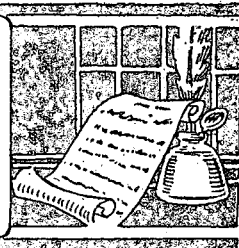
LESLIE T. WHITE

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—DECEMBER 23



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



TIS the week before Christmas, and there is enough stirring around this house to scare a reindeer silly. We have had to read so many Christmas stories that we haven't had time to carve sentiments appropriate for the season in our desk-top. The man at the next desk has already begun to chant carols while he works. There is a steady stream of authors, large and small, literate and illiterate, who need to sell stories right away so they can buy presents for their huge families. Yesterday two men brought in a ten-foot Christmas tree which nobody here ordered. It's handy to hide behind, anyhow.

Meanwhile, the theological debates continue briskly in these columns. Here's another set-to with Mr. Corydon Snyder.

LEE L. DODDS

I am accepting your invitation to comment on the letter of Corydon Snyder in the ARGOSY of Nov. 4th.

I deduct, from the tone of his letter, that he does not believe in the Bible, although he says he believes in a God. This, in itself, is rather contradictory, for how can a man believe in a God, unless he believes in the source of his information? He thinks it is sacrilege to mention "other gods," yet, according to the Bible, Jehova himself mentions them, calling some of them by name. See: Deut. 10-7; Deut. 12-1 to 31; Numbers 25-1; Kings 11-33; and many others. I could give over a dozen quotations on this point.

Mr. Snyder also confesses that he is unable to conceive what God may be like. I would suggest that he look in the 1st chapter of Genesis, verse 26: "And God said, 'let us make man in our image, after our likeness'." This is confirmed in Genesis, chap. 9, verse 6.

It seems to me rather like mawkish sentiment to criticise something about which nobody knows anything. For, after all, who can offer any logical proof that any God exists? Belief is no proof. There are many religions in the

world, and each one thinks their God is the only one. Who is to say which is right? As a true American, I believe that each person has a right to believe as he wishes.

Personally, I am very fond of fantastics and have been from boyhood, when I read Jules Verne's works. Fifty or sixty years ago, they, too, were fantastic, but many of his "impossible" stunts have become everyday affairs. I have learned many scientific facts, and have educated my mind to think along scientific lines, by reading such stories.

I might mention that I learned two very valuable lessons from Lew Wallace's "Ben Hur." "That we must worship something is a law which will continue as long as there is anything we cannot understand." Also: "Learn of philosophers always to look for natural causes in extraordinary events."

I am willing to give full credit to the author of any fantastic story, for having a vivid imagination. As the holder of over thirty-five patents, I appreciate the value of such an imagination.

LEBANON, OHIO

WE'RE glad that Mr. Dodds stepped into the discussion with his thorough knowledge of the Bible. Also, it's interesting to find a professional scientist among the fantastic fans; we've often wondered how the trained mind reacts to pseudo-scientific fiction. Favorably, we've learned now. . . . There is another score-card this week, an intriguing one. From

ARTHUR BAUM, JR.

No question about your six best stories of the year. The first three, at least, confirm ARGOSY's place of leadership in the publication of distinguished fiction.

Here's the roll of honor:

1. Early American
2. Mother Damnation
3. Shepherd
4. Savage Quest
5. Benefit Performance
6. Señor Sleight-of-hand

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.